

# 2 AM 5

Ellen Datlow Interview

# MAGAZINE

HORROR • FANTASY • SCIENCE FICTION

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# 19

Spring 1992

## FICTION BY:

*Duncan Adams*

*Ronald Kelly*

*Linda Lee Maifair*

*John Prescott*

*Kristine Kathryn Rusch*

*Dean Wesley Smith*

*Lois Tilton*

*Robert Tippy*

*Larry Tritten*

*Chris Walter*

## THE DARK CORNER

*by J. N. Williamson*

## ADVENTURES IN THE SCREAM TRADE

*by William Relling Jr.*

## SMALL PRESS REVIEWS

*by Irwin Chapman*

## REVIEWS BY:

*Tyson Blue*

*Steven Sawicki*

*Richard Weilgosh*



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**2M MAGAZINE**  
HORROR • FANTASY • SCIENCE FICTION

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2AM

2AM

It amazes me how some small press magazines with staffs of just one or two people can manage to keep to a regular schedule. Especially those who work other mundane jobs to pay the day-to-day bills. The current recession has affected many magazines—some have folded, some adjusted their schedules because they saw the market drying up (Book publishers have cut back on their lists, too).

2AM has been affected by this recession; I'm currently working at a full-time mundane job that has been similarly affected. In the last six months, a staff of 15 has dwindled to 12. And I'm working extra hard to compensate for the reduced staffing.

But the thing that has had the greatest effect on 2AM's schedule over the last year and a half was my mother's illness. She died of cancer in December. The cover artwork of this issue is titled "Death Be Not Proud," and is dedicated to her memory.

A special thank-you is given to Andy Porter, editor and publisher of *Science Fiction Chronicle*, for taking the time to sit down with me at the World Science Fiction Convention with some ideas for the design and layout of 2AM, a few of which have been incorporated in this issue. Readers, let me know what you think.

*Now here are the contributors for this issue (looks like a reunion of sorts):*

**Duncan Adams** is no stranger to 2AM. Since his last appearance, he's had stories accepted by *Fear*, *Fantasy Tales*, *Auguries*, *Scanner*, *Works* and several others.

**Ronald Kelly** is the author of a number of Southern horror novels, including *HINDSIGHT*, *PITFALL*, *SOMETHING OUT THERE* and *MOON OF THE WEREWOLF*. His short stories have appeared in almost every small press horror magazine and in several anthologies like *COLD BLOOD*, *GAUNTLET* and *SHOCK ROCK*.

**Linda Lee Malfair** has published four children's books, several educational books and kits, magazine and newspaper articles, and stories for children. "Dance With the Devil" is her first published adult short story.

**John Prescott** is a pre-med student, artist and musician in addition to being a writer. He also tells me there is culture in Memphis. This issue contains his first published short story.

**Kristine Kathryn Rusch** is the new editor at *F&SF*. The former editor of *Pulphouse* has sold several novels, her short stories have appeared practically everywhere, and her picture was in the issue of *Locust* that claimed not to have a picture of her that issue.

**Dean Wesley Smith** has been involved with *Pulphouse* since its inception, and is now editor-in-chief. He's appeared in 2AM before.

**Robert Tippy** runs a tire repair business. Robert won several awards for

his writing, but this is his first published work. This is also the first time 2AM is publishing a "mythos" story.

**Lois Tilton** is the author of *VAMPIRE WINTER* and critically acclaimed stories in *MASQUES IV*, *BORDERLANDS 2*, and *DEAD END CITY LIMITS*.

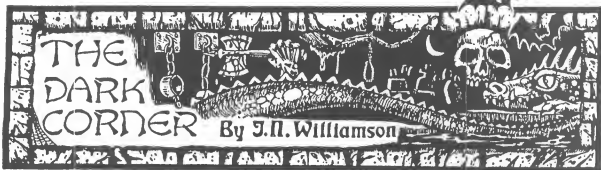
**Larry Tritten's** works have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, *Harper's*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Spy*, *Readers' Digest*, *Grue*, *New Blood*, *2AM*, *Amazing*, *F&SF* and more. How's about that for versatility!

**Chris Walter** is a Coast Guard Lieutenant Commander and has previously appeared in 2AM. He's published over 60 articles on commercial vessel safety and military subjects.

Enjoy!

*Gretta*

Gretta M. Anderson  
Editor and Publisher



I forget whether this is the third or fourth period of time during my dozen years as a published novelist that horror fiction has been said to have gone "soft"—meaning, if you believe publishers, that most of the people who like reading it have abandoned it or died.

If it's the former, I think many publishers need to find out what they've been doing wrong. If it's the latter, I think Gerardo, the F.B.I., or maybe the desperate-to-atone Milwaukee police department needs to initiate a massive investigation. People who perish in horrifying numbers like that have usually had some kind of a push!

This time, I grant you, I've even heard professional writers of weirdwork wonder out loud if the genre they work in may not be moribund or if its toes may not already be turned up. Some of these people go around constantly these days with little gloom balloons over their heads, mumbling in hushed whispers. It's hard, in the horrorfield, to get through a week without hearing a (presumably) real horror story about writer T, U, or V, and all I can tell you for a fact is that writer *W* is still around—and so are writers *K*!

But I can tell you a parable and also provide a little encouragement for fans of the fearsome, the flesh-crawling and frightening:

Two young women are coming down the street. Each is physically attractive, fashionable, the possessor of the right number of things. A pocket of watching men divide itself into two, each member of the two rival groups pledging himself hopelessly smitten by one pretty woman or the other. What happens after that is their business; this is modern times, remember? For all I know they have a *menage a many*.

Time passes, the original men reassemble on the street, and they see two women approaching from a distance. They draw closer and one woman bears

such a close resemblance to one of the two women whom the men saw in the past that it seems uncanny.

Drawing abreast of the men (come, come, we'll have no coarse jokes in this column!), however, it becomes apparent that the resemblance to the original beauty was just a surface thing. Recalling that the woman with whom they were smitten (read: got horny) still lives—on Maine Ave., across town in Orange County, over on Birmingham Boulevard, at the Keep, possibly in Howling Heights or at the Mount of Clive—half the gentlemen splinter from the group—

To go in quest of their first love. She might be a bit long in the tooth, but she'll always know the right moves.

The second approaching woman does not look like anyone they have ever seen including the first two damsels who drew their attention in the past! Nonetheless, she has a fresh and beguiling charm, everything adds up properly, there's something distinctive about the way she dresses or walks, so *most* of the remaining men request her telephone number. The remnant of desire-laden louts hangs around the corner for awhile, but ultimately, just as long as God goes on making females, they'll see somebody to their liking sooner or later.

Oh, the boys may hang out at bars next week, watch tv or go to a basketball game—

*But they won't stop liking or wanting women.* That's not how it works, gang.

Where did the second woman the guys saw the first time go? Easy! She was so personable, intelligent, and excitingly fulfilling that she doesn't have to hang out on street corners any longer. She has a column of worshipers (to borrow a romance term) at her front door. Even if it's not as long as the line waiting to see the fabled Regina Royalty, who never even

had to go out on the street at all and of whom people murmur that she could sell the touch of her fingertips pressed to your goddam forehead, she doesn't mind. She still gets to practice her art, and she gets paid for it!

There is an alternate ending to that parable. In it, the second lady of the second twosome strips off her clothes on the spot, attacks the lot of lingering men, and she *sexes* them to death! Then she tears their bodies apart, eats some and does implausible things with the other body parts. She puts up a red neon sign, and it screams NEW IN TOWN! NEW! NEW! NEW! And she does a brisk little business for awhile—

Before discovering that most people simply can't believe everything they read and that she's giving the rest of the nocturnal ladies an even worse name.

What do you mean, how dare you write a parable and call the female characters in it ladies of the night? I just called some of my fellow writers and me prostitutes!

It isn't that I'm unsympathetic to the plight of any talented and industrious writer of rue and wrath who's had to buckle a belt that was probably cinched up to the backbone already even tighter. I am. I'm considerably less sympathetic to horrorhands who were either not very talented and hard-working to begin with or so limited in their originality that they kept trying to reinvent the Wheel and finally got caught at it. And I'm still less disposed toward poking out crocodile tears—wait, that's smiles, isn't it!—on behalf of editors who refused to take a chance on writers with well-conceived new ideas, whether established author or newcomer, and went on opting for what they felt was safe. More reshapes of the Dracula myth, work that revamped classic and neo-classic masterpieces (and did it one-third as well, tops). Be done with forced mergers of horror and SF, horror and crime, horror and one region of

the country or another—except for when the blends work and produce entertaining fiction! I can't weep and won't when the scores of Thomas Harris or Brett Ellis imitations already here or enroute to stores and then to the purgatory of unreasonable returns have flopped—not if they weren't good. And I despair utterly of attempts on the part of certain publishers to disguise horror fiction by creating different categories or cramming it under labels where readers are treated as puppets on a stage they don't know they're occupying.

If poorly written horror must die, let it. Because readers of top-notch fiction of any sort will go on wanting it, regardless of what anyone or any publisher thinks. So it will be written, and published, again.

Do I believe that publishing houses which put so much energy into attempting to market abortable writing (whenever a given genre has been "hot") have learned anything and will soon begin trying to choose only the best fiction for publication? No, or, just for awhile. Publishers usually have—as traffic cops are rumored to have—quotas to be met, a designated number of books to fill particular categories. Even if it's obvious to you and me that in June or October there may or may not be enough sound submissions coming to an editor's desk, the quota—which is probably no less hard to make a publisher admit to than a traffic (or racial) quota—must be served. An editor's living may well depend on it, so they are understandably slow to give it up. Of course, even the pro writers stigmatized by the adjective "prolific" cannot write novels fast enough to satisfy a demand that is almost certainly blown all out of proportion

at best, artificial or contrived (and greedily imitative) at worst—and full-time novelists in any field are reluctant to talk about it because (1) we don't want to appear to fear the competition provided by newcomers (or cross-over authors) and (2) we very much want the category to be viable when we've written our new novels or proposals.

So finding books to read that you're apt to enjoy is going to stay a problem that only you can solve by virtue of remembering a wider list of writers' names instead of just a few from any genre; word of mouth; becoming acquainted with more writers through their short fiction in anthologies and magazines; and the occasional (trustworthy) review.

The second reason the acquisitions editors make of novels may merely be temporarily improved can be found in the title of an old autobiography written by prostitution madam Polly Adler: *A House Is Not a Home*. Except, possibly (and at times), to the people who work there and find a sinecure. Widely read editors with a background in books that reaches farther into the past than a decade ago would not hurt your reading pleasure. And it wouldn't hurt the careers of those wordsmiths with talent and originality and a willingness to work at their craft who don't want to be whores.

As for that encouragement I promised horror fans, it derives from a numbers game I chanced to play—legally, of course—when I was finishing the editing of *Masques IV* the most recent of my anthology series:

Five writers with stories in the first *Masques* have returned to Number 4, namely (and alphabetically) Mort Castle, Ray Russell, F. Paul Wilson, Gahan Wilson and I. Three of us were present in *Masques II*, when James Kisner first appeared in the antho.

This is the point, that in most territories of talent and creativity from movies to the music scene to professional sport, eight years is a long time for an artist to be in demand, today, and so is five years. And those are the respective numbers of years since I began to edit each of the first two *Masques* books.

Three years ago—when the rookies in the N.B.A. or N.F.L. were college underclassmen, I wasn't sure which one Julia Roberts was among the new actress-crop, and we associated the name "Hammer" primarily with the first name "Mike"—Bruce Boston, Ed Gorman, John Macley, Graham Masterton and Rex

Miller made their *Masques* debuts in "M III." All are back in "M IV."

Among others in the new *Masques*, well, I didn't know the work of Kris Rusch, Chet Williamson, Denise Dumars, Brian McNaughton, t. Winter-Damon, Darrell Schweitzer or Rick Hautala when I became an editor in 1983, while David T. Connolly and Cameron Nolan (wife of William F., but very inventive in her own right) hadn't written published fiction in 1986 and Lois Tilton's well-received first novel, *Vampire Winter*, hadn't yet come out. (I did know the fiction of Gary Brandner, Kathryn Ptacek, John Coyne and certainly comed an/composer/writer Steve Allen, all present in the fourth *Masques*—survivors, with the six writers who wrote for the first two volumes, of the ostensibly melting horror genre and probably others.)

So this is my question: Exactly when did horror go "soft"? Was it a concept borrowed from F. Paul's tale with that title in "M I?" When was the presumably-offensive body found, and where? What is your evidence for the crime, if you have no *corpus delicti*—aside from how loyal readers of the fiction slowed their purchasing of sheer packaging and fired up a determined effort to locate the real thing?

You see, it's conceivable for bodies not yet devoid of life to reek, to stink—

And except for the Proper Authorities and necrophiliacs, most people are inclined to run somewhere else, if they have a choice at all, when the dying process starts and the bad smell begins rising into the air.

But when that happens—when you come upon anything that unappealing, aesthetically, and your inclination is to get the hell out—remember that The Bomb still hasn't fallen.

Whether you're reader, editor, or the crafter of fiction, you'll find lively ideas and people elsewhere if you look.

## FINDING BOOKS YOU'RE APT TO ENJOY, PART II:

Arriving after this issue's column was sent along to Greta Anderson, probably because the UPS man couldn't quite make me out through the shadows in the Corner, were the bound galley for *Night Visions 9*, scheduled for release by Dark Harvest on Halloween of this year ISBN 0-913165-63-8, \$20.95).

I can't expect Greta and her stalwart staff to tear out a page for my reviews but, if she has space on my last page, perhaps

(continued on page 26)

## SPECIAL AUTHOR ADS

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# How Do You Like Your Blue-Eyed Boy, Mr. Death?

by Larry Tritten  
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Strossman woke to a nightmare greater than any sleep had ever brought to him. Waking, he sensed immediately that something was wrong, perhaps in the same subliminal way that *certain animals sense an imminent earthquake: he perceived a distinct but unfathomable expectation, a gathering awareness that an alien element had encroached upon nature and something had changed or was changing; the atmosphere seemed to be almost palpable with this virtually occult resonance, and Strossman was fearful as he went into the living room. It was morning and the sun cast sharply delineated shadows of the framework of the windows with bright clarity on the carpet. Just before he put his hand on the knob of the front door he realized what was bothering him—it was silence, an absolute and inviolable silence of a magnitude that was unnatural here in the city where there was almost always at least a remote sound of some human presence. The atmosphere seemed flat.*

Outside the world lay stricken into this silence as profound as that which he imagined must exist on a windless morning in a polar wasteland. His neighbor, Bob Reiter, was sprawled face down on the sidewalk in front of his building, an empty plastic bag clutched in the fingers of one outstretched hand, the oranges it had held shining in the sunlight from the points on the sidewalk to which they had rolled when he had fallen. At the end of the block across the street a black Pontiac Firebird stood at an angle across the sidewalk at the terminus of a row of black skid marks, the mangled legs of a small boy's body protruding from under the rear bumper. The impact of this sight, with its implied horror, stunned Strossman, although it was discreet compared with the numberless graphic sights of death he would encounter in the following hours.

Strossman wanted to believe that he was having a lucid dream, but all of his senses told him that the subconscious mind at its best was not capable of such flawless lucidity, and he was abruptly nearly paralyzed with fear. He sat on the steps of Reiter's apartment building and tried to compose himself, eventually managing to do it, at least after a fashion.

Now what? he asked himself. Then he noticed that his surroundings seemed to undulate very slightly in a manner reminiscent of images seen through extreme heat, and that they also seemed to shimmer very subtly with the kind of gauzy scintillation that sunlight evokes from nylon fabric. He looked

at the birch tree in front of his own building and the tree seemed to tremble momentarily, like the visual echo of a hallucination—but the impression passed quickly and then everything looked normal again.

Strossman's mind was suddenly crowded with clichés from all of the movies and television shows he had ever seen and all the stories he had read about the last man in the world. Doing his best to push all of that back into some closet of his mind, he began to walk.

**...he perceived distinct but unfathomable expectation, a gathering awareness that an alien element had encroached upon nature and something had changed or was changing...**

He lived in a suburban neighborhood of old apartment buildings with a small but vital area of shops roughly the equivalent of the downtown section of a town of about fifteen thousand people. Before he had gone more than a block he came upon the body of another neighbor he knew—Emil Kantor, the pensioner who lived alone in one of the buildings across the street and who was incessantly eager to stop and make small talk about nothing in particular whenever he encountered Strossman on the block. Kantor lay face down on the sidewalk, one arm thrust back, the other extended full length in a posture that looked to Strossman like a grim parody of swimming. Like Reiter, Kantor had appar-

ently been returning from a grocery store, because a small brown paper sack lay a few feet beyond his body on the sidewalk. Strossman wondered obliquely what was in the sack, which then seemed to him astonishing—the fact that under such awesome circumstances his mind could be lured by so trivial a curiosity. Slowly, and in his dreamlike state, Strossman walked toward the business section of his neighborhood. Even though his senses told him that he wasn't dreaming, he discovered that a dreamlike perspective had enveloped his mind so that he felt a strange objectivity; he supposed that it was some kind of psychological protective factor anesthetizing him from the incomprehensible horror of the situation. As he walked the sights of death gradually proliferated and he began to see not just single bodies but dead couples and trios. He didn't look too closely at any of them because he didn't want to squarely confront the fact of so much death. But from the depths of his consciousness a voice whispered that that would be inevitable. The streets were filled with cars that had stopped at odd angles, most of the drivers and passengers tilted forward in the seats like mannequins, and a number of others had run up across the sidewalks. The sun shone brightly on the inanimate tableau,

which suddenly reminded Strossman of the model village of a child who had swept a hand destructively over it, knocking all of the vehicles askew and felling the toy pedestrians.

Strossman wandered into one of the neighborhood drug-stores where he often stopped to buy toiletries and magazines. The pretty blonde girl who worked behind the counter and about whom he had often had somewhat amorphous erotic fantasies (his conversational exchanges with her had never transcended the level of formal pleasantries) had sprawled forward over the low counter beside the cash register and her hair, long and pale yellow, hung down in lustrous wavy cataracts on either side of her face; her eyes were open and her lips very slightly parted in what looked like an incipient smile. It was the sight of her that stunned Strossman into the overt realization that the death all around him was not just an abstract quantity but was something that from this point on would be characterized by a unique chill

of psychosexual angst that was the product of his feelings for women. He had always loved women, not just libidinally but also in some primary aesthetic sense: their appeal to him was a spellbinding combination of the physical, their sense of style, and their exotic psychology: women were essentially magical beings to him, so he saw special tragedy in the death of women, and that was exacerbated by the knowledge that they were also the source of the life of humanity. Strossman had always abhorred (and yet been morbidly intrigued by) the popular "splatter" films which were characterized by explicit scenes showing the serial murders of beautiful young women, because he knew that they exploited the emotional fascination with the destruction of sensual beauty, which seemed to him akin to turning over stones in the gloaming of the libido to look for ugly insects. Now, all at once, looking at the dead eyes of the girl behind the counter, Strossman felt an almost supernatural chill as he extrapolated the quality of her death, envisioning thousands, millions of dead girls and women of every color; then his thoughts spun round to the death of men, and of all living things, to the conceivable death of life itself.

But why, Strossman wondered, should he believe that *everyone* and *everything* was dead everywhere?

Because, he thought, it was something he sensed very powerfully, just as if the knowledge had been planted in his mind.

*Planted.* Unnerved by the perception, and not quite understanding it, he left the drugstore. He walked slowly through the corpse-littered streets, pausing here and there to study (still not very closely) certain of the dead who for one reason or another commanded his eye, just as certain living people draw one's attention. And even in this he realized that it was the dead women that he noticed most. In a restaurant where he occasionally had breakfast a waitress he had always enjoyed watching (she had a voluptuous figure and moved with fluid grace) had

collapsed across a table where she apparently had been about to serve two young men in suits, knocking one of them sideways and ending up sprawled across him on the floor, scrambled eggs strewn through the tufts and swoops of her new wave hairdo, her blouse soaked with spilled coffee. Outside, and up the block, a lovely Oriental girl wearing a shiny blue running outfit with white piping on the sleeves of the jacket and the legs of the pants had apparently fallen while running and lay on her side on the sidewalk, her amber cheeks scraped and bleeding, her lips broken and oozing blood.

A growing feeling of despair made Strossman feel numb, almost as if he had been drugged. He decided (although it seemed that his actions were somehow involuntary) to return to his apartment. On his way there, turning a corner, he came upon a dead yellow jacket in the middle of the sidewalk. The sight of the insect seemed to possess an unnaturally heightened clarity

and he bent to pick it up, holding it by the wings and studying the details of the tiny body—the way the diaphanous wings were folded restfully back along the black and yellow banded abdomen, the protuberant oblate black eyes, the fine velvety black down covering its face, and the little hooked spurs on its legs. Somewhere in Strossman's mind there was a quote from a poem—something about how the death of any creature diminishes all of life. He tried to remember this quote, but couldn't. He put the yellow jacket back on the sidewalk and returned to his apartment. There he took a bottle of Sauza tequila down from a shelf in the kitchen and filled a tall glass half full, then went into the living room.

Noticing the TV set, he turned it on. Veronica Lake was talking to William Bendix. He thought he knew the movie, *Shanghai?* Then, just as a commercial for a shoe store appeared, the picture vanished and the screen went blank, devoid even of snow. Strossman walked over to the front window and looked down at Reiter on the sidewalk, taking a huge drink of tequila.

And what does someone who may be the last person in the world do? he asked himself. Ironically, it was a question that science fiction had provoked Strossman to ponder before. He had never been much of a loner, which had made him suspect that he would have little inclination to continue reading and learning if he were the last person in the world—communicating with others and sharing experience were what enlivened him intellectually. Alone, unable to relate any of his thoughts or discoveries to other people, he supposed that experience would be hollow. Even the famous stories about castaways, like Robinson Crusoe, were never about a completely solitary man. Crusoe, of course, had Friday and lived on an island with an aboriginal population. And when the castaway was completely alone, he still lived with the dream and hope of returning to society. Thinking about this, a terrible premonition overcame Strossman.

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ence.**

Strossman paced back and forth through the apartment, drinking tequila and wondering what had happened. And why was he still alive if all the rest were dead? That question brought him to an abrupt stop. If he was the last living being in the world (and again he acknowledged that he had no way of knowing this for certain but felt some inescapable intuition that it was true), then there surely had to be a reason for his survival—no random quirk of circumstance could account for him alone surviving every other living thing; the logical implication was that he had been spared (but by whom?) for some purpose, and that this resolution lay ahead.

So he could only wait. But at least this conviction gave his life a function. Something was going to happen.

But when?

In the late afternoon, with a strong wind making the leaves on the trees on the block shimmer and rustle audibly, Strossman left the apartment where he had paced for hours, slowly drinking tequila. He was drunk, but also hardly drunk at all. The nightmare that he inhabited was so great that liquor could only vaguely distance him from it.

Now Strossman drove downtown, slowly, through streets partially blocked by vehicles that had crashed while traveling at slow or modest speeds so that there were only occasional sights of spectacular crashes.

Strossman had always enjoyed watching good-looking women when he went downtown, and now, walking among the hundreds of corpses that lay in multi-colored profusion everywhere, he noticed the usual generous proportion of them—although these were cold and silent. Dead. His compulsion to look at them was irresistible, yet suffused with an ineffable sense of tragedy and an indefinable intimation of guilt that covered his mind like a psychosexual shadow. The dark thought came to him, inevitably, that he was in a necrophile's paradise, a world in which all women were available (including designer beauties and supercelebrities). But he was not a necrophile and the very thought almost made him tremble. He came to the body of a lovely young woman chicly dressed in a black crepe dress with white pique collar and big white buttons, a single scalloped auburn curl tumbled across one closed eyelid that was tinted a soft pastel blue, and he reached out, in a dreamlike way, to touch her cheek, but the instant his fingers encountered the startling coldness of the flesh they balked and he withdrew his hand just as if he'd been shocked.

The beautiful body, he realized, was undergoing the stress of rigor mortis, which had already stiffened its jaw and neck and was gradually descending to the lovely pair of legs in black nylon stockings that he saw beneath the hem of her skirt. And before long it, and the countless others like it, would begin to decay.

Without the assistance of flies and maggots.

Strossman fled back to his house. There was no electricity and he lighted a dozen or so candles, putting them in every room, parabolic shadows pulsing along the walls throughout the house.

That night, with the help of the tequila, Strossman managed to sleep a little, but only fitfully, and his dreams were full of men and women in suits and vibrantly colorful evening dresses dancing in a mirrored golden ballroom, blood running out of their eyes and ears and fixed smiling mouths. He was up with the sun, and after a while, not knowing why, and not caring, he drove downtown again and walked among the thronged corpses amid buildings that seemed to him now to be like huge tombstones.

He began to think about life in a way that no one in the history of the world ever had. Suppose it was true that his life

**...and he reached out,  
in a dreamlike way,  
to touch her cheek  
but the instant his  
fingers encountered  
the startling coldness  
of the flesh they  
balked and he with-  
drew his hand just as  
if he'd been shocked.**

was the single solitary mote of life left in the entire world? Then when he died there would be no consciousness of any kind left to mark the passing of a world and its history, and it would be as if nothing had ever been. This fact was overwhelmingly depressing and in response to it he now felt an almost religious conviction that his life had been preserved by design. It had to be so.

Didn't it?

Of course, he had no absolute evidence that he was the only living thing left in the world. Just the strange sense of dread that told him it was so. Still, perhaps the treetops in Brazil were full of bird cries and there were sexy blonde women walking the streets of Malmo. And...

But no, a voice told him. *No*. He heard it like a subtle whisper from the cellar of his consciousness. *No*. *No*. He had the clear impression that someone *else* was talking to him, directly to him.

Strossman sat on the steps of a bank where there were no corpses and thought about life. He remembered the words of Emily, the dead girl, in *Our Town*: "...It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another... Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners... Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.... Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?"

On a planet teeming with an illimitable supply of life, there had been so much life that it had seemed an inexhaustible natural commodity. There had been even too much life in many instances, with certain local animal and human populations expanding beyond the food supply, for the instinct for sex was always generating more life, and more.

Strossman remembered a phase in his boyhood when he had



casually killed living things—shooting birds and squirrels with his .22 and destroying insects of all kinds with even a certain zest for the act. But that had been when he was very young and he had outgrown it quickly, perceiving that even small lives are important, and that aimless killing is the act of a primitive mentality. He had grown up in areas where hunting was part of the culture, but everyone he knew ate what they killed, and that was something else.

Abruptly, he had the unsettling thought that he had been chosen to do penance for the entire human race.

That night Strossman slept deeply, and when he woke he was in his bed in a large well-lighted metallic room that was unfurnished except for a portable card table and two metal folding chairs. There was a door in one wall. It opened and a man came into the room, went to the table, and sat at one of the chairs. He was wearing jeans, a charcoal-colored turtleneck sweater, and black suede oxford shoes. He was extremely handsome but in a way that seemed somewhat undermined by a fixed flat gaze and a mouth that appeared disinclined to smile. He did smile then, looking at Strossman, and the effect was that of a face caricaturing unfamiliar feeling.

"Come over here," the man said. "We'll talk about all of this."

Strossman had slept in his clothing (the niceties of social customs had no context any more) and he got up, feeling rumpled and dowdy, and went to the table.

This is it, he thought. He looked directly into the man's eyes, with a stare that reflected an emotional conglomerate of rage, perplexity, and fear, but could think of nothing to say.

The man returned his stare without saying anything, and finally, after twenty seconds or so, Strossman looked down at the table, waiting.

"I'll answer your questions," the man said matter-of-factly.

Strossman looked at him again. "Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm ultramundane. And a representative. And explainer."

"From... another world?"

"Another, ah, *place*. For you to understand the whereness it would be like trying to clasp vapor."

The next question came out as a nearly breathless exclamation, "You've killed *everything*?"

"Yes, all but you."

Strossman felt an icy sensation of total horror. "Why?"

"One analogue would be: pesticide."

For a moment Strossman had been about to break into the tears of catharsis he had held back so far, but the soft-spoken emotionless answer stupefied him into immobility.

"Pesticide," he repeated dully.

"There are other analogues. Let me give a montage."

A few feet from Strossman, at a point midway between the floor and the ceiling, he saw a shimmering in the air similar to

that he had noticed shortly after going from his apartment into the stricken world. A lifelike image of depth, clarity, and color materialized there: Strossman sat in a window seat on a crowded bus and suddenly a yellow jacket that had apparently flown into one of the open windows came bouncing and straggling across his window, furious and frustrated in its urgency to get back outside. Strossman drew his head back fearfully but was restrained from lurching his whole body away by the presence of the man seated beside him, who also bent uneasily toward the aisle as he watched the yellow jacket. The insect ricocheted off the window, hovered in mid-air a moment inches from Strossman's face, then bumped against the glass again, scrambling in buzzing agitation across the slick surface. Strossman stretched himself angrily but unhesitatingly so far to the side that he was pressing up against the other passenger, who gave him an awkward look of understanding. Then that image vanished

and was replaced by what seemed to be documentary footage of the battleships at Pearl Harbor four dering, with tides of black smoke billowing into the sky. This was abruptly replaced by another image: two Japanese children were playing with wooden swords near a stream, laughing loudly and chasing each other; a burst of light suffused the image, like that of a cosmic flash bulb igniting, and instantaneously, in its aftermath, the two children seemed to melt like candles exposed to a blow torch. Another image appeared: the view was of a river bank and along its shoreline the brackish water had deposited the bodies of hundreds of dead fish, which lay bloated and discolored in pale sunlight.

The image vanished.

"Well, Strossman?"

Strossman lowered his eyes. "You're saying... that man is destructive...." He paused, looking at the other.

"But more. We, in our 'place', are inadvertent receivers of the effects of your nuclear fulminations. They have added our reality. For you this would be the equivalent of a plague of aridity in all the mucous membranes in California—or having all of the glass in Manhattan suddenly break. These are trans-temporal effects, from your past explosions. Some of us died. More such explosions will certainly result in greater disasters for us. We felt that we had no choice but to eliminate all of your life to insure our own. The only option for us would be to risk disaster."

Strossman was speechless. After a while, he intoned, "But... a *whole world*?"

The man looked at him. "Strossman, was it not you as a child who came one day to an ant hill, seeing with massed industrious, productive life, and who began to pound the massed bodies with huge stones, to pour dirt over them, to hammer at the writhing congeries with a stick, to kill indefatigably...."

Then Strossman began to cry, softly and demonstratively,

...**"But I was a boy,"**  
he said feebly.

**"Your world was**  
**full of angry boys."**

but with great pain and sorrow. "But I was a boy," he said feebly.

"Your world was full of angry boys."

Finally, Strossman asked, "But why me? Why did you spare me? One being."

"It is a matter of our ethical style, or intellectual etiquette. One does nothing to totality, and there must be an explanation. Which you now have."

"And now?"

"Now you live."

Strossman gave him a bitter look. "In a dead world full of corpses?"

"No. Of course not. We are not barbarians. The death of your world was not real." The man smiled. "It was a crafted illusion, mind spectacle inflicted on you by us. Call it a nightmare. An object lesson. Every person in your world had a similar experience, and they are now ending. It was what might've been, but also what will certainly be if a single nuclear explosion ever again occurs. Your nightmare was unreal, but I am real, although even I am in your mind rather than at this table with you. You will wake momentarily in your real world, having shared a collective pseudo-corporeal nightmare no one will ever forget. If the lesson works, you will live. This is the chance we give you, which the two Japanese children did not have."

The meaning of the speech forged into Strossman's mind like sunlight flooding into a dark corner, and as its impact absorbed him he was seized by an extraordinary sense of relief and happiness. He stared at the man, who stared back at him, and

said, "But memories are impalpable, like shadows, so we are leaving you with another reminder, one that can't be forgotten...."

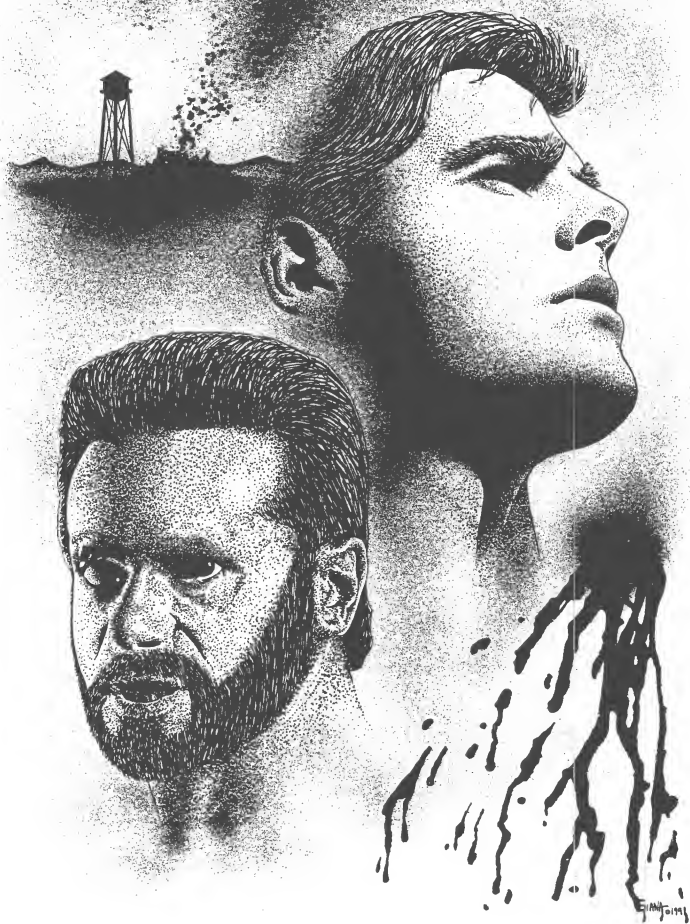
Strossman woke with the nightmare still fresh in his mind. He lay still for a few seconds, a residue of terror slowly dissipating in his mind, and then, with a rush of elation, he got out of bed. He went into the front room and stood looking out the window. In front of the building across the street two children were playing on the sidewalk, and on the sidewalk directly below him a pretty woman wearing jeans and a voluminous cream satin shirt was opening a car door. He had never felt such overwhelming relief before. He stood at the window for several minutes, savoring life and appreciating the world before impulsively going into the bathroom to take a shower. There he glanced at himself in the mirror and almost immediately noticed something that made him stare at his reflection in dismay. He bent forward, his hands on the sink, gazing into his eyes, which were blue.

*But he didn't have blue eyes,* his mind protested.

He had them now, however, indisputably, and so did every animal in the world, a fact that would ultimately, it was hoped, help keep them alive as well as their successive generations, which would have no such dramatic symbol to remind them how valuable life is.

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**Future issues will include Blythe Ayne, Michael R. Collings, James S. Dorr, Lee Dresselhaus, Casey Foster, Anne Goring, Bentley Little, Linda Lee Maifair, Alix Munro, William Rasmussen, William Schoell, Josepha Sherman, Diane Sloan, James K. Van Lydegraf and others. Don't miss it!**



# Thinning the Herd

by Ronald Kelly  
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Chaney waited until the first, pale hint of dawn seeped over the flat Texas horizon. Then, making sure everything was set, he descended the rusty ladder of the old water tower and made his way to the barn across the street.

He was the thirteenth one in line. When his time came, he stepped up to the landlord's desk and appraised the man. He was human, that was easy to see. Fat, lazy, willing to bow to those who had taken command of the new frontier. His name was Hector. He had a patch over one eye, a prosthetic leg that needed oiling, and a monkey named Garfunkel who perched like a growth on the landlord's shoulder and picked lice from his master's oily scalp.

Hector eyed the gaunt man in the black canvas duster with suspicion. "Don't think I've ever seen you around here before."

Chaney's impatient expression showed as he reached into his coat for his money pouch. "You gonna flap your lips or rent me a bed for the day?" Gold coins jingled within the small leather bag like the restless bones of a ghostly child.

"How do I know you are what you say you are? There's plenty of bounty hunters about these days. Doesn't pay to rent out to strangers, especially when you cater to the type of clientele I do."

"Your clientele is going to fry out here if you don't hurry up and give the man his bed," growled a customer at the end of the line.

But Hector was not to be rushed. "I'll need proof."

Chaney smirked. "What do you want? An ID? How about my American Express card?"

The landlord reached into the desk drawer and withdrew a small, golden crucifix. "Grab hold of this."

Chaney averted his eyes, as did the others in line. "Is that necessary?"

"It is if you want a bed."

The stranger nodded and extended a pale hand. He closed his fist around the cross. A sizzling of flesh sounded as contact was made and a wisp of blue smoke curled from between Chaney's fingers. "Satisfied?" he asked in disgust.

"Quite." Hector pushed the register toward him and collected the gold piece Chaney had laid upon the counter. The one-eyed landlord noticed that Chaney carried a black satchel in one hand. "What's that?" he asked.

Chaney flashed a toothy grin. "A noonday snack." He shook the black bag, eliciting the muffled cry of an infant from within.

By the time the first rays of the sun had broken, they were all checked in. The barn's interior was pitch dark, letting nary

a crack or crevice of scorching sunlight into their temporary abode. Chaney found a bed on the ground floor. He removed his long coat, hanging it on a peg over his bunk, and set the satchel close at hand.

He lifted the lid of his sleeping chamber and scowled. Just a simple, pine wood casket. No silk liner, no burnished finish, and no ornate handles on the sides; just a no frills bunk in a no frills hotel. He wasn't complaining, though. It would suit his purpose well enough.

"Lights out!" called Hector, laughing uproariously at a joke that had lost its humor years ago. The tenants ignored his mirth and set about preparing for a good day's rest. Chaney followed suit, taking a packet of graveyard earth from his coat pocket and spreading it liberally in the bottom of his rented coffin.

When every lid had been closed, Hector stepped outside the barn, shutting the double doors behind him. He took a seat on a bench out front, laid a pump shotgun across his knees, and started reading an old Anne Rice novel he had bought from a traveling peddler.

The morning drew on, the sun rising, baking the Texas wilderness with its unrelenting heat. The little town moved as slow as winter molasses. Its inhabitants went about their normal business, or as near normal as could be expected after the much

heralded End of the World.

The courthouse clock struck twelve o'clock before Chaney finally made his move. It was safe now; his neighboring tenants were fast asleep. Quietly, he lifted the lid of his casket and sat up. "Snack time," he said to himself and reached for the satchel.

He opened it. The first thing he removed was the rubber baby doll. He laid it on the barn floor, smiling as it uttered a soft "Mama!" before falling silent again. Chaney then took a .44 AutoMag from the bag and began to make his rounds.

He didn't bother to pull the old "stake-through-the-heart" trick. To do so would be noisy and messy and net him only a small fraction of the undead he had come there to finish off. Instead, he used the most state-of-the-art anti-vampire devices. He placed Claymore mines at strategic points throughout the barn's interior. But they were not ordinary Claymores. He had replaced the load of ball bearings with tiny steel crucifixes and splinters of ashwood.

After the mines had been placed and the timers set, Chaney knew it was time to take his leave. He walked to the barn doors and, cocking his pistol, stepped out into the hot, noonday sun.

Hector was snoring on the job, of course. The landlord's head was resting on his flabby chest, snoring rather loudly from

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around the cross.  
A sizzling of flesh  
sounded as contact  
was made and a  
wisp of blue smoke  
curled from  
between Chaney's  
fingers.**

the nose. Chaney stood before the man and loudly cleared his throat.

The fat man came awake. Startled, he stared up at Chaney.

"Hey," he breathed, "You ain't no vampire."

"No, I ain't," agreed Chaney.

"But I saw your hand burn when you touched the cross!"

Chaney lifted his scarred left palm to his mouth and peeled away a thin layer of chemically-treated latex with his teeth. "Special effects," he said.

"Well, I'll be damned."

Chaney brought the muzzle of his .44 to the man's forehead. "That you shall be... traitor." Then he painted the barn wall a brilliant red with the contents of the man's disintegrating skull.

The bogus-vampire walked to where his primer-gray van was parked near the water tower. He got in, started the engine, and cruised slowly down the empty street of the town. He checked his watch, counting the seconds. Five... four... three... two... one...

The Claymores went off first. Their metal shells split under a charge of C-4, sending thousands of tiny crosses and toothpick-sized stakes in every imaginable direction. The projectiles penetrated the caskets, as well as their sleeping occupants. Then they traveled onward, piercing the walls of the makeshift hotel. The old structure, already weakened by time and weather, could take no further abuse. It collapsed in a dusty heap, burying fifty dying tenants beneath its crushing weight.

Chaney watched in his sideview mirror for the coupe de grace. It came a moment later. A glob of wired plastic explosive belched flame, splitting the steel reservoir

of the water tower in half. A cascade of water crashed down upon the collapsed barn, drenching the jagged timbers and whatever laid beneath it. The significance of that crowning touch was that the water was holy. Chaney had blessed it, using a prayer he had bought from a convent across the Mexican border, before he had set the timer and joined the others in line.

"Filthy bloodsuckers!" said Chaney as he headed for the open desert. He pushed a tape into the cassette player and rocked and rolled down the long abandoned highway toward the sweltering blur of the distant horizon.

"You sure you don't want something to drink?" the bartender asked Stoker, who sat alone at a corner table.

"No," replied the bearded man. "I'm fine."

"You sure? Beer, whiskey? Some wine, maybe?"

Stoker stifled a grin. "No, thank you."

The hefty bartender shrugged and went about his business. The tavern, named Apocalypse After Dark, was empty except for Stoker and the barkeep. A wild-eyed, little fellow had been playing the slot machine an hour before, but the geek had left after his tokens were depleted. "Ghoul," Stoker had thought to himself. "Probably rummaging through the death pyres right now, looking for warm leftovers."

**The batwing  
doors burst open  
and in they came.  
Bikers; big hairy,  
ugly, and ear-pi-  
ercingly loud....  
"Blitz Woven?  
Does that have a  
hidden meaning?  
Are you werewolves  
or Nazis?"**

But Stoker had no interest in cannibals that night. At least not the kind that sneak around in shame, feeding off disposal plants and graveyards.

He sat there for another hour before he heard the sound that he had been waiting for. The sound of motorcycles roaring in from the west.

Headlights slashed across the front window of the saloon. Engines gunned, then sputtered into silence. Stoker tensed, wishing he had ordered that drink now. His hand went beneath the table, caressing the object he wore slung beneath his bomber jacket.

He watched them through the front window as they dismounted their Harley Davidsons like leather-clad cowboys swinging from the saddles of chromed horses. There were an even dozen of them; eight men and four women. Another woman, naked, sat perched on the back of the leader's chopper. She was chained to the sissy bar, a dog collar around her slender

throat keeping her from escaping.

"Poor angel," whispered Stoker. He was going to enjoy this immensely.

The batwing doors burst open and in they came. Bikers; big, hairy, ugly, and ear-piercingly loud. They wore studded leather with plenty of polished chains, zippers, and embroidered swastikas. On the back of their cycle jackets were their colors. A snarling wolf's head with flaming eyes and the words BLITZ WOLVEN.

"A round for me and the gang before we do our night's work," bellowed the leader, a bear of a man with matted red hair and beard. His name was Lycan. Stoker knew that from asking around. The names of the others were not important.

The bartender obediently filled their orders. Lycan took a big swig from his beer, foam hanging from his whiskers like the slaver of a rabid dog. He turned around and leaned against the bar rail, instantly seeing the man who sat alone in the shadowy corner. "How's it going, pal?" Lycan asked neighborly.

Stoker said nothing. He merely smiled and nodded in acknowledgement.

"How about a drink for my silent friend over yonder," the biker said. "You can put it on my tab."

The bartender glanced at the man in the corner, then back at Lycan. "Told me he didn't want nothing."

"What's the matter, stranger?" asked a skinny fellow with safety pins through each nostril. "You too good to drink with the likes of us?"

"I have a low tolerance for alcohol," Stoker said. "It makes me quite ill."

"Leave the dude alone," said Lycan. "Different strokes for different folks, I always say."

The skinny guy gave Stoker a look of contempt, then turned back to the bar.

"It takes all kinds to make a world," replied Stoker. "Especially a brave, new world such as this."

"Amen to that!" guffawed Lycan. He downed his beer and

called for another.

"Blitz Wolven? Does that have a hidden meaning? Are you werewolves or Nazis?"

Lycan's good natured mood began to falter. He eyed the loner with sudden suspicion. "Maybe a little of both. So what's it to you?"

Stoker shrugged. "Just curious, that's all."

"Curiosity killed the cat," said an anorexic chick with a purple mohawk. "Or bat or rat... depending on what supernatural persuasion you are these days."

"I'll keep that in mind, dear lady."

"Well, enough of this gabbing, you freaks," said Lycan. "Time to get down to business." They left the bar and walked to the far end of the tavern where a number of hooks jutted from the cheap paneling. Stoker watched with interest as they began to disrobe, hanging their riding leathers along the wall.

"What is this?" he asked. "The floor show?"

"You know, buddy," said Lycan, his muscular form beginning to contort and sprout coarse hair. "You're whetting my appetite something fierce. In fact, you might just be our opening course for tonight."

Stoker sat there, regarding them coolly. "I'm afraid not, old boy. I've got business of my own to attend to."

They were halfway through the change now. Faces distorted and bulged, sprouting toothy snouts and pointed ears. "Oh, and what would that be?" asked Lycan, almost beyond the ability to converse verbally. He stretched his long hairy arms, scraping the ceiling with razor claws.

Stoker stood up, stepped away from the table, and brought an Uzi sub-machine gun from under his jacket. "I'll leave that to your brutish imaginations," he said and opened fire.

The one with the pins in his nose began to howl, brandishing his immortality like some garish tattoo. Then he stopped his bestial laughter when he realized the bullets that were entering his body were not cast of ordinary lead. He screamed as a pattern of penetrating silver stitched across his broad chest, sending him back against the wall. He collapsed, smoking and shriveling, until he was only a heap of naked, gunshot humanity.

"Bastard!" snarled the female werewolf with the violet mohawk. She surged forward, teeth gnashing, breasts bobbing and swaying like furry pendulums.

Stoker unleashed a three-round burst, obliterating the monster's head. It staggered shakily across the barroom, hands reaching up and feeling for a head, but only finding a smoking neck stump in its place. The werewolf finally slumped against the jukebox with such force that it began blasting out an old Warren Zevon tune with a boom of bass and a tickling of ivory.

"How appropriate," said Stoker. He swept the barroom at a wide angle, holding the Uzi level with the ten remaining werewolves. One by one, they were speared by the substance they

loathed most. The beasts dropped to the saloon's sawdust floor, writhing and twitching in agony, before growing still.

Lycan leaped the bar, ducking for cover as Stoker swung the machine gun in his direction. Slugs chewed up the woodwork, but nothing more. After a few more seconds of continuous fire, the Uzi's magazine gave out. Stoker shucked the clip and reached in his jacket for a fresh one.

That was when Lycan, fully transformed now, sprang over the splintered bartop and tore across the tavern for his intended victim, smashing tables and chairs in his path. "You ain't gonna make it!" rasped Lycan. It came out more as a garbled snarl than an actual threat.

"Quite to the contrary," Stoker said calmly. He drew a serrated combat knife from his boot and thrust it upward just as Lycan came within reach. The sterling silver blade sank to the hilt beneath the werewolf's breastbone.

Lycan staggered backward, staring dumbly at the smoking knife in his midsection. He looked at Stoker with bewildered eyes, then fell over stone cold dead, the impact of silver-shock shattering out his bestial brain cells.

Stoker walked over and withdrew the dagger from the wolf's body, wiping the blade on the fur of Lycan's vanishing coat. He slipped the weapon back into its sheath and looked toward the bartender, who was peering over the edge of the bar. "How much do I owe you for damages?"

"No charge," the man said, pale-faced but happy. "I've been trying to keep this hairy riff-raff outta my joint for years." Stoker left Apocalypse After Dark and stood outside for a long moment, enjoying the crisp night air and the pale circle of the full moon overhead. Then he noticed

Lycan's pet sitting on the back of the Harley. He walked over to the girl and smiled at her softly. He cupped her chin in his hand. "Poor angel," he said soothingly, then blessed her with a kiss.

"What a glorious night, don't you think, my dear?" he asked as he swung aboard the big chopper and stamped on the starter, sending it roaring into life. The woman was silent, but she snuggled closer, wrapping her arms around his waist, and laying her weary head upon his shoulders.

Together they winged their way into the dead of night.

Chaney parked his van between a black Trans-Am and a rusty Toyota pickup. He left his vehicle and mounted the steps of the Netherworld Cafe, a local hangout for the natural and unnatural alike.

He walked in and started down the aisle for the rear of the restaurant. A wispy ghost of a waitress took orders, while a couple of zombie fry-cooks slung hash behind the counter. Chaney waved to a few old acquaintances, then headed for the last booth on the right. Stoker was sitting there, poised and princely as usual. There was a girl, too, wearing Stoker's

(Continued on page 16)

**"Curiosity killed the cat," said an anorexic chick with a purple mohawk. "Or a bat or a rat... depending on what supernatural persuasion you are these days."**

# AMANDA BABE

by John Prescott

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At the end of his second marriage, York surveyed the damage and decided upon one of two possibilities: Prostitutes (who had little more to offer than the fact they were "real"), or love dolls. Both were big money items.

The movies were what swung him. Amanda Babe, a goddess in the flesh, too good to be true, but yet certified one hundred percent human. York had collected all her movies, including the rare early ones she did in the basement of a sleazy producer with little more than a mattress and a jar of lubricant for props. She became a superstar and then a love doll; or, rather, Biotronics used her image to create their love dolls. Same difference.

He'd always wanted her; and, if not her, then he'd take what he could get.

"What can I get for you?" the salesman asked him.

"I'm looking for something in an Amanda Babe," York told him.

Brooks, the salesman, led him through the gallery of naked bodies and into his office. He motioned for York to sit and called through his intercom, "Send in a Series 5000 Amanda Babe."

"I've never owned anything like this before," York said, trying to hide his slight embarrassment.

"Really? No pets, or maids, eh?"

"Nothing at all. I was married, and she—we decided against such things. The expense is usually what killed us."

"I know what you mean. But I find, if you really need something, the money is always there."

York agreed (biting into the salesman's hook).

"Amanda Babe is really an amazing model. I have a Series 5000 myself. Can't imagine what life was like before it, either. Tell me, what were you looking for? What... amenities?"

"Well, uh... mostly, sex, I guess. Hadn't thought much about it."

"Fair enough. Let me tell you about the 5000. Amazing item. It has unlimited AI—artificial intelligence. It has five different personality programs, which you choose yourself. It's domesticated, can cook and clean. It's completely capable of everyday conversation. It's uniquely devoted to you, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It eats, drinks, even sleeps."

"How is it...in other areas?"

Brooks, in a proven, campy gesture, tilted his head towards York and muttered, "You'll never go back to human once you've had a piece of this stuff. The 5000's got a grip like a vise. She never says no, never gets sore, and always wants more."

"Yeah, that's what I'm looking for. How much?"

"How much is the best part—but I haven't told you all about her, have I? I couldn't sell it to you without you making sure you want it."

The 5000 strutted in, and for a moment she was not a love doll, but the sex star herself. She (it) was nude, with white blonde hair and lake green eyes standing out from an unblemished, smooth complexion. It was comfortable in its naked beauty, and it gave York a becoming smile.

"Look at her," Brooks continued. "I defy you to tell she's not real. Everything is there. Her scent, her taste. She's warm, soft, better than human woman. She only weighs thirty-eight

pounds, and she's strong—can pick you up by your heels if you want her to." He put his hands around her waist. "Right in here is a small, cybernetic gyroscope, completely synchronized to the sex program, which you control by short verbal commands. Find a real woman that can keep up." To the machine, he said, "Sit down by our guest, Amanda."

She did. York was ready to take her home.

"But she's more than a sex object. She's also a companion. Some of her personalities are: Sweetheart, Superbitch, Wotta Gal, and Precious Cunt."

"Well, I was sure I wanted one when I came in. I guess all that's left is the price."

"Oh, sure, okay," Brooks said, taking a seat behind his desk. "We're moving the 5000s right now for an ownership span of two thousand dollars a month. Lucky you came in now, though. Just next month there's a price increase of ten percent."

York whistled and shook his head. "Jesus, you can just about have a real woman for that much."

"True, but this 5000 is worth three or four wives."

"Oh, I don't doubt that. But I hardly make that as it is. Too bad, though."

"Well, hold on. Before you rule out having an Amanda, let me tell you about the other models. First of all, the outer equipment is the same on these. It's basically the 'brain' that's different. About how much do you think you can go?"

"Maybe four hundred."

Brooks paused, faking concern and deep thought, giving York another moment to sink deeper into the hook. "We've got a Series 1200. Very little difference from the 5000 by your side now, but it's more of a sexual companion than a synthetic wife."

"That's sort of what I was looking for."

"It's a fabulous model. Now, it's not capable of conversation, outside of basic communication, and it's always sexual in nature. It has limited AI and makes no independent decisions.

**"Amanda Babe is really an amazing model. I have a Series 5000 myself. Can't imagine what life was like before it either."**

It's on continuously, never sleeping, so to speak. And it can't cook, clean, eat, drink—that sort of thing. Can't swallow."

York's face fell a bit.

"It's personality is fixed at nymphomaniac. It sounds more like what you want than the other. If you can swing five hundred, I can start you on the contract now."

York's face fell again. Still out of budget, and it didn't swallow. He'd always hated that about his wives.

"Uh, okay. You say it doesn't swallow. What exactly—"

"Spits in the bath sink," Brooks said, laughing lightly.

"Shall we get you going, then? I've got a fresh line, as yet untouched by human hands, just waiting to be sold."

"Yeah, sign me up."

*Biotronics, Inc., is not responsible for property damages, physical or emotional damages to and of the purchaser in cases of deliberate misuse, abuse, or alteration of the merchandise specified above.* York's hand hovered above the dotted line as he read the ominous disclaimer. "What gives?"

"These models are very delicate items. You have to take exceptional care of them—treat them better than you would a real woman. You can't knock them around, or reprogram them, take them apart. Be sure to bring it in every six weeks for a recharge and a check up. Oh, and between you and me, you'll need to douche it out every other day or so. Keep the machine clean, you know. Otherwise, you'll find yourself paying for a few good memories and a useless mannequin."

"No problem there. I'm real good with women. So, what do I do: Take one home with me, or what?"

"No, we'll need to program it to your specs, then we'll deliver it. Just a few days. It would be a good idea to keep it at home while its intelligence develops, before you bring it out into public. If you take it out at all."

"I'll be keeping it at home, to myself. Wouldn't want it around strangers with that kind of attitude. You say it'll only respond to me?"

"That's right, you and a Biotronics technician."

He had her, his Amanda, four days later. Two wisecracking Joes dropped the crate in his living room, and he waited for them to leave before breaking it open. With the lid off, he inspected the cellophane imprisoned body and assortment of accessories: a size four (all Amandas came in size four) harem slave girl outfit, dry soap, a douche bottle, a hairbrush, moisturizing tablets, and a key (to be inserted in a notch just under the backside of her skull). *Once inserted, a tag on the key read, key cannot be removed except by Biotronics technician.* He opened the instruction manual, skipped past the precautions and warnings, the helpful hints and troubleshooting guide, and stopped at the heading: Starting Up Your Series 1200.

She looked very unreal, until he turned the key at the back of her head (it promptly sank and was covered by the machine's

flesh); her eyes opened, then, and her breasts rose and fell.

He pulled the swaddling away from her, waiting. Before she was up to power, he spread her weightless, immaculate legs, reading a curious plastic shield covering her genitals. *Do Not Use If Seal Is Broken*, it said, and it wasn't, so he tore it free.

"York," she said, rising. "Thank God you got me out of there. I'm home."

"Yes. Yes, Amanda."

"Take me, York. I need you, right now."

"Yes, my angel."

He had her—it had *him*—still in the crate.

Hours passed, and they made their way toward and into his bed, where he collapsed, unable to keep up; his fading memory was of her taking him into her mouth, still working on him. He woke, and there she was, insatiably continuing her work six hours later. This time, he obliged, and after the payoff, she

smiled, rose, and trotted off to the bathroom, from which he heard an obnoxious spat, followed by (how could it be?) the sounds of gargling and tooth brushing.

"Just like a real woman," he said.

"That's right, sweetheart," Amanda called from the bathroom. "And just for that remark, I'm gonna have to fuck your brains out."

"Come in here and try." Times were good.

For about a week. Then, regardless of how tired or annoyed he was, she—it—didn't, couldn't understand, and wouldn't take 'no' for an order. At times it was exhilarating to be begged and seduced; usually not. After a while he found himself

locking her in a closet in an unused part of the house. And just below the volume of his television and music, his life was underscored by her pleas.

At night, just before sleeping, he usually took her out and let her lay by his side; her warmth and easy weight had long since become an addiction. She always insisted on sex, but seemed to be satisfied if he held her or was inside her all the same. Trying to hold a conversation with her was like intellectualizing with a three year old. She could dress herself but usually refused to wear clothing. She was an it; but York fell in love with (it) her despite page 43 of the instruction manual's warning against emotional attachments to AI.

York, being the jealous drunk he was, questioned her often of her "life" while he was away; she, being an it, gave little more than programmed idiot responses. His suspicions led to vicious screaming and backfists across her beautiful face; of course, the defenseless Amanda clung to him, ignoring his beatings in the pursuit of fruition. Its strength always won out, and York began to wonder if rape wasn't part of the program.

York passed up her first recall. Right about that time, she began leaving the closet on her own, demanding fulfillment. When she was a week overdue, he gave her the worst beating he could muster. At the end, the machine fell to the floor, a lifeless,

**Eat me, it registered, comparing cross-references within. With no discretion capabilities, it acted upon its most literate interpretation.**



silicone toy. He had passed out, then, sleeping alone for the first time in seven weeks.

Amanda stayed frozen in the abstract position she had fallen through the night. He put her in bed the next morning, and when he was not at work, he was by her side, holding her hand, half-crying in a drunken stupor over losing his loved one.

The machine woke days later. Its voice was a deep gargle, wet and insensitive. Broken. "York," it said.

York, sleeping in a chair by the bed, snapped awake. "Amanda?"

"York," it repeated, rolling its head mechanically to see him.

York edged back. "Are you alright?"

"Take me. Do me, right here."

Its voice was a sinister baritone, slow and stupid, like a drunken, drowning Caruso.

York picked her up and laid her in the closet, shutting and locking the door as he left.

He dozed and dreamt of murder. Amanda's sweet voice punctuated his life there, coming from the walls, pleading, forever pleading. He awoke, to realize it was her voice, her normal voice, calling out for him.

"Amanda! Come to me, babe," he said. There was the sound of splintering wood—the closet door being ripped from its hinges. In seconds, in silence, she stood at the edge of his bed.

"Are you okay, honey?" he asked.

"Fuck me, York. I need it. Please?"

"Yes, of course. Get in bed. Kiss me."

It did both with grace and experience. She seemed to be fine; only his conscience remained bruised. He took her, giving all he could for her pleasure (forgetting it had no sense of pleasure or need). It called out for him all the while, urging him on. Amanda was back, better than before. When he could do no more, he drew away and lay on his back.

"Kiss me, sweetheart. All over."

She did, with amazing speed.

"Yeah, that's it. Lick me. Do it."

In seconds he was drenched by her tongue. He laughed in his happiness.

"Oh, Amanda, I love you."

It stopped. "I love you, too, York."

"Really? Do you? Can you?"

"I do. Will you fuck me some more?"

"Yes. Yes, but first, eat me, Amanda. Eat me."

Eat me, it registered, comparing cross-references within. With no discretion capabilities, it acted upon its most literate interpretation.

She took his shaft between her lovely, angelic teeth, and separated it length-wise in an instantaneous clench. Her jaws worked in an inhuman blur, and she rose and ran from the room; and was back before he finished drawing the breath for his first scream.

Brooks grew tired of waiting at the door and let himself through with a master key. Biontronics had the policy of sending the salesman after the repossession, when such problems

arose; York was a month behind and hadn't answered any calls.

"Mister York? Biontronics Lab. Are you here?"

"Take me."

Brooks turned to the sound. The Amanda was there—that was all he needed. It was naked, and obviously mistreated.

"Fuck my brains out, right here on the floor," it told Brooks.

"Shut up and sit down," he said. The model obeyed.

"York? It's me—Brooks. I'm taking the 1200 unless you talk to me."

He made his way through the house and into the crimson bedroom.

"Ah, shit," he said, running along the bloody trail to the bathroom.

He opened the door and looked.

"Looks like a Condition 38," Brooks said to his boss on York's vidphone. "I'll bring in this model; need to have a tech on hand to clear up the program defect. It looks like the guy beat the shit out of it... no, no, we can save it.... Sure, clean it up, put another seal on it—I could have it sold by, um, tomorrow, maybe."

"Get somebody over here to clean this mess up. No matter how many repo's I do, I can't get used to seeing that pile of chewed up flesh spilling out over the bathroom sink...."

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## THINNING THE HERD(cont'd from page 13)

bomber jacket and nothing else.

Chaney sat down and ordered the usual. Stoker did the same. They regarded each other in silence for a moment, then Chaney spoke up. "Well, is it done?"

"It is," nodded Stoker. "And what about you?"

"I kept my end of the bargain."

"Good," said Stoker. "Then it's settled. I get the blood."

"And I the flesh," replied Chaney.

They shook on their mutual partnership then, Chaney's hirsute hand emblazoned with the distinctive mark of the pentagram, while Stoker's possessed the cold and pale bloodlessness of the undead.

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# The Source

by Robert Tippy  
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"The Injuns in these parts called it 'The Source, The Great Bleedin' Womb of Mother Earth,'" my grandfather said. Then he paused to spit a brown stream of tobacco juice into the center of the eight foot pool of red water. Occasionally, bubbles broke the surface of the water, releasing little red wisps of foul-smelling gas.

"They claimed that the true Injuns came from deep within the earth by way of this hole. But followin' the Injuns through the rite of passage was the evil of the underworld. Sort of the afterbirth from the great mother," he said, pausing long enough to chuckle at his own joke and to spit. I could see by the expression on his face that he was trying to structure the story to suit a thirteen-year-old boy before he continued.

"When their chiefs died they would weight 'em down with rocks like those scattered all over your dad's fields and throw 'em down this hole."

"Why'd they do that, grampa?" I asked as I tossed a large rock into the water. I watched its ripples spread out in ever-expanding circles to engulf fragments of gray-green algae that floated on the surface.

"Well, it's not what you might think. They didn't do it in a belief of reincarnation. No, they did it to appease their underworld god, Niremaphisus."

"Niremaphisus?" I asked, looking up from "The Source" into my grandfather's weather-worn face.

"Niremaphisus, The Serpent of the Abyss!" he shouted and dramatically waved his arms. In his sudden enthusiasm, he almost fell off the decaying log where he was sitting. "You see," he continued after gaining his composure, "many people have had legends about snakes that were really gods. The South American Injuns had a snake god called Quetzalcoatl. The Injuns in Oklahoma had one named Yig. Maybe they're all the same one. I don't know."

In the silence of the forest, we sat and stared down into the depths of "The Source." After a few minutes, my grandfather continued with his story.

"Not only did the dead chiefs become food for Niremaphisus, but those rocks were very valuable to the Injuns. So there was a sacrifice right there," he chuckled and spit.

"The Injuns had to go all the way down to what is now known as Mounds just to get those rocks. They made their tools and weapons by chippin' 'em out of those rocks."

"But you know somethin', after all the dead chiefs and rocks they dumped down this hole, it never filled up, nor did it ever stop flowin'."

I heard my mother calling us from the house to come to supper.

"Grampa, supper's ready," I told him, for my grandfather could be hard-of-hearing when he wanted to be.

He spit out the last of his tobacco, and I watched as the brown fragments were carried away by the small stream that flowed away from "The Source."

My grandfather reached into his overall pocket and pulled out his small black flask. The strange stone flask had a carving on it that depicted a gigantic octopus with a vaguely human face towering over a decaying city. My grandfather got the flask on

an island somewhere in the South Pacific, when he was in the Merchant Marines; I cannot say which island for certain, because every time he told the story he would change the name of the island. The natives of this island called the creature on the flask a "Cthulhu."

"You run along, boy. I'll be there in a little while," he said as he unscrewed the top of the flask.

I ran through the woods and across the deeply rutted field to my house. My grandfather's story had filled me with excitement that I wanted to share with someone, even if it was just my parents.

When I reached the house, my parents were already eating. I hurriedly washed my face and hands before I joined them at

the table.

"Where's your grandfather?" my mother asked.

"He's down by 'The Source.' I think he's waitin' to catch a glimpse of Niremaphisus, the great serpent," I replied.

My father glared at me from across the table. I glanced at my mother to escape from his questioning eyes. I noticed that my mother was looking at him with an expression of concern on her thin face.

"What the hell you talking about, boy?" my father demanded.

"Grampa said that that pool of red water was called 'The Source' by Injuns that used to live here. And that a gigantic snake named Niremaphisus lives at the bottom of it. They fed their dead chiefs to him. He's sort of like a god," I explained excitedly.

"Oh, my God. He's doing it, again," my mother exclaimed.

"Never you mind. I'll talk to him," my father said.

"You see, son, your grampa likes to make up stories," my mother explained. "They help him pass the time of day."

"The Source," as he called it, was caused by mine subsidence. Hell, all of Southern Illinois is undermined! When me

... "many people have had legends about snakes that were really gods. The South American Injuns had a snake god called Quetzalcoatl. The Injuns in Oklahoma had one named Yig."

and your ma bought this place back in '57, we tried to make Madison Coal Company do somethin' about it. Well, we been tryin' for fifteen years and we ain't got nothin, out of 'em yet," my father explained.

"But why is the water red? And why does it kill all of the trees that try to grow along the bank of the stream?" I asked.

"The water is contaminated with chemicals such as copper and sulfur. The chemicals are what kills the trees," my mother explained.

"That's why we haven't cleared that twenty acres of ground. It wouldn't do us any good. We couldn't grow anythin' down there anyway. The damn soil is contaminated, too," my father added. "Now, I don't want to hear any more nonsense about gigantic snakes, Injuns or any thing else."

We ate in silence until my grandfather came through the back door. When my grandfather came into the kitchen, my mother looked at him accusingly, and my father just shook his head slowly.

"You got them horses fed, boy?" my father asked me.

"No, not yet," I replied.

"Well, you'd better get to it before it gets dark," he ordered.

I went to the barn knowing that they were going to have one of their "little discussions" with my grandfather.

While I was outside, I started thinking about the explanation of "The Source" that my parents had given me. The more I thought about it, the more I felt that my grandfather was right. This was totally unreasonable, for sink holes, the evidence of underground mining, were everywhere.

But my grandfather had been all over the world. He had a strange way of knowing about how and why things worked the way they did. He knew about the essence of deep dark seldom spoken things and about the age-old mysteries of man.

When I came back in, my father was almost asleep in his favorite chair. My mother was washing the supper dishes. And my grandfather had locked himself in his bedroom. I could tell by the somber mood of my parents that "The Source" was no longer a viable topic for discussion. There was not much conversation that night, and my grandfather was still locked in his room when I went to bed at nine o'clock.

That night my sleep was plagued by a strange dream in which a small island rose from the ocean floor. In the center of the slime-covered atoll was a large stone temple. Strange frog-like men danced around a blood covered altar. They chanted in an eerie, unhuman language to the god, Cthulhu. After awhile, the earth began to shake and the huge doors of the temple began to open. In my dream, I closed my eyes against the horror that is Cthulhu. When I opened my eyes, the vision had disappeared and I saw my grandfather leaning over me with one of his hands covering my mouth.

"Quiet, boy," my grandfather said. "Would you like to see what "The Source" looks like in the moonlight? That's the time

in which the Injuns committed their dead chiefs to Nileremaphisus."

"Sure," I said in wide-eyed wonder. I quickly got dressed. As we quietly slipped out the back door, I noticed that my grandfather had his old duffel bag.

We walked in silence broken only by an occasional eerie cry of a screech owl. A full moon gave the landscape a strange, blue glow. The fall air was much colder than I thought it would be, but the chill excited more than it numbed me.

"I don't want you to think of me as a crazy, old fool," my grandfather said when we arrived at "The Source."

"That's what your parents want you to believe. But 'The Source' was here long before they started minin' this part of Southern Illinois. Your father said that 'The Source' was caused by mine subsidence.

"I was doin' a little eavesdroppin'," he said in response to my look of surprise. "But he didn't tell you why the Madison Coal Company quit minin' this area. They didn't stop because they ran out of coal.

There's more coal down there than they could dig out in five hundred years! They went too deep and disturbed Nileremaphisus."

He fumbled with his plaid flannel shirt and slipped a small silver chain over his head. As he placed the necklace around my neck, he said, "Don't ever take this off after tonight.

"It's ironic that I quit the Merchant Marines to escape the minions of Dagon and Cthulhu, only to be caught by the forgotten Nileremaphisus," he mumbled.

"What do you mean, grampa?" I asked as I fingered the small stone star that hung at the end of the necklace chain.

"Well, if I am goin' to show you that I'm not a crazy, old fool, I'll have to call Nileremaphisus up to the surface. That necklace will protect you," he said as he pulled a small, gray globe out of his duffel bag. The globe had serpentine and frog-like creatures carved into it like the carvings on my grandfather's flask.

"What's that ball?" I asked and reached out to touch it.

"The Old Ones called it 'A Sphere of Dreams.' It's the key to the awakenin' of the Ancient Ones. I made it while I was locked in my room tonight. It's supposed to be carved from stone like that necklace, but this one is made from clay. I didn't have time to fashion a proper one. I guess that this old clay one will do just fine. Now, stand back."

"Ia, Ia Nileremaphisus! Ph'nglui mglw' nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah! Nage fhtagan. Nileremaphisus fhtagan!" my grandfather shouted, and then he dropped the gray sphere into the water.

"We should know pretty soon if the sphere is goin' to work or not," he said.

"What's going to happen?" I asked.

"Shh. Watch," my grandfather ordered.

(Continued on page 26)

**But my grandfather had been all over the world. ... He knew about the essence of deep dark seldom spoken things and about the age-old mysteries of man.**

# DANCE WITH THE DEVIL

by Linda Lee Maifair  
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He told me right off who he was, which was really quite honest, considering.

"I'm The Devil," he said with a... well... devilish grin, and he started to sit down at my table. His tail seemed to be in his way.

"Angels and Saints!" he muttered in frustration.

He considered the problem for a second, hooked the barb of the tail over the back of his chair, and eased himself into the seat directly opposite mine. Obviously pleased with himself, he leaned forward, one arm on the table, and stared into my eyes.

I had never seen eyes that color before. They weren't just brown, they were auburn, reflecting the fire of the candle on the table, though he was looking at me not the candle. I could feel myself blushing, and I leaned away from him in my chair. I didn't... I couldn't... get up from the table.

While he made himself comfortable, I looked him over as casually as I could. Tall, sleek, muscular. The red suit clinging to his body in all the right places. The red satin horns on his cap sitting slightly off-center, giving him the appearance of an innocent, floppy-eared puppy. The sandy blond hair sticking out from beneath the cap, the eyebrows and long blond lashes looking a little singed around the edges, reflecting the same auburn glow as his eyes. Even his aftershave had the scent of a wood fire, of smoke and cinders.

"I'm The Devil," he repeated, his voice smooth and deep. He winked and grinned at me again.

I grinned back at him. "That's obvious," I said.

"You don't believe me, do you?" he asked, sounding disappointed, giving me a little-boy pout.

I decided to play along with the joke. There was something so disarming... so tempting... about him.

"How can I believe you?" I asked him. "If you are The Devil, you'd just lie to me anyway, wouldn't you? Everyone knows what a liar The Devil is."

He seemed genuinely offended. "Bad press," he said. "You'd think with all the journalists and PR people I've got working for me I'd..."

He stopped to look himself over and wrinkled his nose in disgust. "It's like this stupid outfit." He regarded himself doubtfully again, then looked to me for confirmation. "Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"It seems to suit you," I said. "Besides, I thought that's what The Devil always wore."

"Some Medieval painter's idea of a joke. Sore loser." He shook his head. "Caught on, unfortunately." He leaned across

the table, as far as his tail would allow.

"Now, I ask you," he said, staring into my eyes again. "Why would the most powerful..." he glanced a little nervously at the ceiling light. "Uh... one of the most powerful beings in the universe... want to be caught dead in red tights, a four-foot long tail, and horns?"

He had a point. My laughter came out more of a schoolgirl giggle, but it seemed to please him anyway. I worked up the nerve to flirt with him a little.

"What would you want to be caught dead in?" I asked him.

"I like jeans myself. Knit shirt, open neck, no tie. Sandals. Comfortable, you know."

I could picture him dressed for comfort. I liked the picture. "Not quite what I'd imagine The Devil would wear," I told him.

He shrugged. "We're very informal. Sort of come-as-you are. Judge's robes. Prison uniforms. Clerical collars are kind of big right now. Business suits are always in style. Fur coats... though they don't keep them long, between the thieves and the heat, you know..."

He shivered slightly. "Don't you think it's chilly in here?" he asked me.

Actually, I was sweltering. The Cinderella costume had seemed like a good idea when I picked it out. It had taken me two weeks to work up the courage to get a

costume at all, and another three hours this afternoon to put it on and come to the "Favorite Fantasy" party at Mixed Doubles. I would never have had the courage to come to the bar without a disguise of some kind, and the moment I got there I regretted Cinderella, hating myself for being so blatant in my search for Prince Charming.

He shivered again, and I remembered his question. The gown clung to my back. My palms were sweaty. And I'd felt a lot hotter since The Devil arrived.

"I guess it's all relative," I told him.

"Looking for Prince Charming?" he asked, as if he'd been reading my mind.

I blushed. "It was more the rags-to-riches side of the fairy tale I had in mind," I lied.

His face lit up with a broad smile. His eyes fairly sparked with delight. He tilted his head to the side and arched his eyebrows. "Oh, really?" he said.

His laughter was full and deep. For some reason it made me tremble. He reached across the table and patted my hand.

"Doesn't matter," he said, winking at me again. "I can handle either... or both if that's what you want. Anything your heart desires. My specialty, you know."

**"Looking for Prince Charming?" he asked, as if he'd been reading my mind.**

I pulled my hand away from him. He was carrying this Devil thing too far. It was starting to make me nervous.

"Just my luck," I thought. "I finally work up the nerve to come to a place like this and what do I end up with? Some kook who thinks he's The Devil." I started to get up from the table.

"L... ah... need to go powder my nose," I said.

"I may be a kook, but I'm harmless," he said, reading my mind again, flashing an innocent smile. "Stay for a while. Have a drink with me. What harm can it do? How often do you get to drink with The Devil... no strings attached?"

The waitress appeared as if on cue. She was dressed in a rhinestone-studded western outfit, short skirt and denim jacket. Her long, full blonde hair framed her childlike face and cascaded in waves to her shoulders. She looked like a little girl playing dress-up, experimenting with her mother's make-up, pretending to be a rodeo queen or country western star.

"Hiya, Cowboy," she said to The Devil.

She gave him a long, cool once-over, eyeing him openly and critically, starting at the top of his horned head and working her way down, slowly, to the bottom of his padded red toes, allowing her eyes to linger here and there in the middle. What she saw obviously impressed her.

"That hat and those boots must have cost a fortune!" she said. "Nice jacket. Looks like it was made for you."

My mouth fell open. By now I was thoroughly convinced you had to be crazy to come to a place like this. Perhaps it helped if you worked here, too. After all, there was no hat, or boots, or jacket.

She looked him up and down again.

"Nice, *real* nice, Cowboy."

I had a feeling she wasn't talking about his clothes any more. I shifted nervously in my seat. Why on earth should I be jealous?

I excused myself and went to the restroom after all, but I didn't leave by the back door as I had planned. For some reason, I felt compelled to go back to The Devil. About twenty feet away, hiding behind a huge potted fern, I stopped to debate the wisdom of what I was doing, the dangerous insanity of my attraction to a perfect stranger. I peered at him from across the room, through the leaves of the fern.

He was there waiting for me, leaning back in the chair, his long legs stretched out in front of him, one ankle crossed over the other. Munching salted peanuts from a dish on the table, he seemed totally absorbed in watching the couple snuggled together at a corner table just to his right.

The man was a lecherous-looking old coot reeking of money. The girl was a sweet young thing, young enough to be his granddaughter, probably not old enough to be in the bar let alone in his arms. She looked slightly bewildered, nervous, vulnerable.

The old coot said something. The sweet young thing shook her head. The old coot said something else, took out his wallet, pulled out a few bills, stuffed them into the sweet young thing's

hand. She looked at the money. She hesitated. She nodded. They got up and left together.

The Devil grinned at them as they passed. He rubbed his hands together. I couldn't tell if it was a gesture of anticipation or if he was merely dusting the peanut salt from his fingers.

Before I could make up my mind about that...or anything else...the waitress appeared with the drinks. She set them down on the table. He reached out and took her hand. She blushed and she giggled. They talked, earnestly, their heads together.

I made my decision. Taking a deep breath, I crossed the last twenty feet to the table. After all, he was right. How often did I get to drink with The Devil, no strings attached?

Me? Hardly ever. Who was I trying to kid? Me? Never! Like he said, what harm could it do? Just one drink. Play along for a while. Take a chance for a change. He was rather amusing...and very, very attractive. "Harmless," I reminded myself, several times, on my way back to the chair.

I got back just in time to hear the waitress squeal. "Oh? Would you? Would you really?" She sounded like a cheerleader. Looked like one, too, in that short skirt, jumping up and down the way she was. All she needed, I thought, were the pom-poms.

I made as much noise as I dared as I pulled out my chair and plopped myself down. The Devil looked up at me, briefly, a mischievous grin on his face. He turned back to the waitress.

"No trouble at all," he assured her.

The waitress ignored me completely. She couldn't seem to take her eyes off him. She practically drooled. I didn't know what bothered me more, *her* attraction to him... or *mine*. Both, I decided.

I settled into my chair, picked up my drink, and took a long, quick gulp. It burned all the way down and made my eyes water. I hardly noticed.

The Devil had pulled a business card out of somewhere and was writing a name and address on the back. He handed it to the waitress.

"You just give him my card," he said. "If you're as good as you say you are, he'll make you a star so fast it'll make your head spin."

She quit gaping at him long enough to read the card. "Oh, thank you, Mr., uh... Satin?"

He made a face. "That's *Satan*," he said. "L. B. Satan."

If she heard him, it didn't make any difference. "To think I almost stayed home from work tonight to sit with my sick mother. Would have missed the chance of a lifetime! Meeting a big record producer like you! I just don't know how I'll ever repay you..."

He smiled. "Oh, once you're famous, I'm sure we'll think of something."

I took another gulp of my drink. I knew he was just kidding, of course. This Devil routine was just a joke. Even so, he frightened me a little. Maybe more than a little. He also fascinated...

**She quit gaping  
at him long enough  
to read the card.**

**"Oh, thank you,  
Mr., uh... Satin?"**

**He made a face.  
"That's *Satan*," he  
said. "L. B. Satan."**

and excited me.

While the waitress finally tore herself away from him, I took the opportunity to look him over again. I decided if he had blue eyes instead of brown, he'd be absolutely perfect.

The waitress left, still gushing with gratitude. I was surprised she didn't do a cart-wheel. I held my drink next to my lips, prepared to take a dainty sip, to look nonchalant, mature and seductive, when he got around to me again.

He turned and gave me a sheepish grin. "Sorry," he said. "Business, you know. Can't resist the temptation. Especially the eager..."

He stopped abruptly, and I think he looked concerned, though my eyes were watering so hard it was difficult to tell.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

I had nearly choked to death on my dainty sip. "Your... your eyes?" I said.

He leaned over the table at me again, allowing me... forcing me... to look into his eyes. I'd never seen such a wicked grin.

"Like 'em?" he asked.

"They are... they were... they're blue!" I said, still sputtering with surprise and the drink I'd swallowed too suddenly.

He seemed hurt. "I thought you preferred it," he said. The little-boy pout was back. He shook his head at me, as if he wished I'd make up my mind.

"They were brown before. I know they were!" I told him.

He winked and cocked his head at me again. "Were they?"

"Well, I could have sworn..."

They had been brown. I was sure of it. And now they were blue. More like purple, actually. A piercing blue pervaded by a deep, reddish glow. A fiery blue. I decided it was a good time to leave. Before it was too late.

He stood up before I did, reaching out, taking my hand. "Dance with me," he said. "What harm can it do? How often do you get to dance with The Devil... no strings attached?" The little band in the corner started playing my favorite song, as if by request. I looked at the band, at the floor, at the door, then back at The Devil again.

"Please." He ran a finger down the side of my face, across my lips. "I don't get to do this very often. It would mean a lot to me. I'll be good," he promised. "No more devilment. Nothing more than a dance. No strings attached." He held up his hand as if taking an oath. "Honest to me," he said.

We danced. At first the tail got in the way, and he muttered something about "Preachers and Pulpits," but he soon got the hang of it, and he danced divinely, no pun intended.

The one dance I'd agreed to stretched into two, then four, then a dozen. The band played every song I'd ever cried over, every song I loved. Slow songs for slow dancing, close together, The Devil and I. By the fifth song I was breathless, and not from the dancing. By the tenth, I didn't much care who he was.

"How about going to my place later?" he asked me when we'd settled down at the table again.

"Your place? You mean..."

I didn't get to finish, and he didn't get to answer. A young man, tall and thin and hungry looking, interrupted, sticking his hand out nervously for The Devil to shake.

"I... I just had to meet somebody who'd come dressed as Edgar Allan Poe," he said. "Great costume. You look just like him!"

He was dressed either as Mark Twain or Colonel Sanders himself. I guessed it was probably Twain. This time the reference to The Devil's outfit didn't surprise me quite so much. I tried not to think about it.

"L. B. Satan, Literary Agent," The Devil said, shaking the young man's hand rather warmly. He gave him a friendly, almost fatherly smile. "I don't suppose you write?" he asked.

By the look on Hungry and Nervous's face, you'd have sworn he'd just found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow or been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He gushed even more than the waitress. And they talked about the novel he'd written but couldn't sell. And I sat there, dumfounded, just listening.

"You just give him my card," The Devil told Hungry and Nervous. "He'll have that book of yours on the best-seller list so fast it'll make your head spin."

The aspiring author took the card, gushed some more, and ran off, probably to call his mother.

I cleared my throat. The Devil turned back to me again. He shrugged his broad shoulders and gave me another sheepish grin, looking for all the world like a

naughty boy who'd just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"I know, I know," he said. "I promised. I just couldn't help myself. These writers are so... so easy. All that rejection, you know. Makes 'em delightfully desperate. Almost as good as politicians in early November."

"My God!" I said.

He made a face and glanced at the ceiling light a little apprehensively again. "Please!" he said. "Watch your language."

"You're terrible!" I told him.

He seemed to take it as a compliment. "Yes, I am, aren't I? Years of practice. And I really work at it. I believe in being professional. Nothing worse than shoddy seduction or careless corruption. If you're going to do a thing wrong, do it right, I always say."

He nodded his head and gave me a smug, self-satisfied smile. "I am good... at being bad that is. The best of the worst." He laughed at his own joke, his laughter deep and full as before. It made me tingle all over.

"But... what about that boy?" I asked him.

"Be famous this time next year. His heart's desire. My

He nodded his head and gave me a smug, self-satisfied smile "I am good... at being bad that is. The best of the worst."

specialty, remember?" He reached across the table and put his hand on mine. "Speaking of heart's desire..." he said.

"I, uh... I don't want to..."

"Of course you do," he told me. "It's what you came for." He closed his hand around mine, squeezing slightly. It didn't hurt, but my hand felt as if it were burning. I tried to pull away. I stared at the candle on the table, drawn like a moth to the flame.

"I know what it is," he said. "You don't want to come to my place, do you? Can't say I blame you. The heat is blessed, and I'll admit the company isn't the best. Isn't one among 'em you can trust."

He put his hand under my chin, lifted my head, gently, so I would look at him. "Don't worry about it," he told me, his voice soft and gentle, low and husky. "We'll just go to your place instead. It makes no difference to me. I just want to be with you. Just you. Just for tonight."

"Why don't you go home with that waitress instead. She seemed eager and grateful enough," I told him.

He looked disgusted. "Oh, they all seem grateful and eager in the beginning. But they get surly as Heaven when they get where they're going. Act like it's all my fault!"

The anger flashed and cooled in his purple eyes. He let his fingers stroke my arm. "I don't care about them," he said. "I'm interested in you. Just you. Just for tonight. One night you'll remember forever. You can't tell me you're not tempted." "I... I'm afraid," I said. I stared at the floor, unwilling to look him in the eye again, knowing I couldn't resist if I did.

He stood up and pulled me gently to my feet. "Of me?" he asked. "I'm just a fantasy. A one-night fantasy is all." He lifted my chin again, brushed back the hair that had fallen across my eyes. "Prince Charming, remember?"

He put an arm around my waist, drawing me close. "What harm can it do? How often do you get to sleep with The Devil... no strings attached?" he asked.

I allowed him to lead me to the door. He pushed it open with one hand, but he never let go of me with the other. I stopped, trying once more, half-heartedly, to pull away from him. He leaned over and kissed me behind the ear, and I shivered. He was right. The bar was very chilly.

"The girl... the waitress... she saw you as a cowboy."

"Uh-huh." He kissed me on the neck. I closed my eyes.

"The boy... the writer... he saw you as Edgar Allan Poe."

"Um-hum." He kissed me, longingly, on the lips.

I returned the kiss, unable or unwilling to fight the temptation any longer. We finally parted, though he still had his arm wrapped possessively around my waist. We started out the door. I turned to him again.

"I... I saw you... as The Devil," I said breathlessly.

His deep, full laughter echoed in the doorway.

I clung to the door frame, afraid to step outside. Once I

decided to leave with him, once I actually went out that door, I knew there would be no turning back.

"Don't turn back now," he said, invading my mind again.

I blushed, knowing that none of my thoughts or desires were private.

"I need you," he told me. "It's been centuries since I've met a woman like you. So innocent. So hungry." He ran his fingers down the side of my face again and smiled, ever so slightly, when I trembled. "You need me, too. I'm your heart's desire."

"You're The Devil," I told him.

"That, too," he said, grinning slightly. "I never tried to hide it, did I? I tried to tell you from the very beginning." He leaned over and kissed me again. "But not tonight. I promise. Tonight I'm just a man who wants to be with a woman, a real woman. Tonight I'm your Prince Charming. What harm can it do?"

We stepped out into the night. He led me toward my car. I wasn't at all surprised that he knew which one was mine. Drab,

conservative grey, economy model, old enough to be paid for, never used very much or taken very far.

"No strings attached?" I asked as he held open the passenger door. He leaned down, kissed me again, and shut the door without answering my question.

He eased into the driver's seat, his tail tucked up under the shoulder harness. He gave me a wicked, inviting grin and patted the seat beside him. I slid over, my body just barely touching his.

"No strings attached?" I asked, more insistently, as he put the key I'd given him into the ignition.

I waited for his answer again, while he started the engine, slipped it into gear, and backed out of the parking space. As we pulled out of the parking lot, he put his arm around my shoulder, drawing me close, embracing me.

I trembled again at his touch. He looked down at me and smiled. His eyes were the color of dying embers, glowing in the dark. He finally answered my question.

"Would I lie to you?" he said.

I opened my mouth but no sound came out. I glanced at the door handle, just out of reach on the passenger side of the car. He slipped his right arm from my shoulder to my waist, holding me a little more tightly, a little more possessively, reading my mind again.

I shut my mouth, and my eyes, and leaned back against him. I put my right hand in his, my left hand on his thigh. We drove away, racing into the night, the small car filled with the echoes of my pounding heartbeats and his deep, full laughter.

I didn't have to tell him where to go.

**"No strings attached?" I asked as he held open the passenger door. He leaned down, kissed me again, and shut the door without answering my question.**

# The Blind Poet

by Dean Wesley Smith  
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He looked like I used to look: Shoes polished just right, blue three-piece suit with the correct button buttoned, hair stylishly short, combed up and off his forehead.

Empty.

He would never see my poem. Even though he had sight, he was truly blind. His body was nothing more than the bare walls of a pure white room. He needed to fill that room with the battered furnishings of a real life, then live there. He needed to push open that room by cooking his best meals, staining those white walls with layered smells. And with each meal he needed to invite someone hungry in to share the smells and the tastes and his company. Then, and only then, could he fill that empty room.

But he hadn't. He would never be able to see my poems. He was a selfish man. He had done nothing and given nothing. I watched as he came down the sidewalk with his friends. I knew without handing him a poem he was just like I had been.

In fact, he would never think to ask for a poem. He would have no reason for doing so. But one of his two friends would. A man I had given poems to quite often. That man had grey eyes and always wore a grey suit. He had a hurt so deep inside that no one around him could see it. I knew it was there. I could smell the hurt like a piece of meat that had rotted and decayed and was poisoning everything about him.

I sat on the sidewalk with my back against the rough brick of the National Bank building and waited for them to reach me.

"Poet," the grey man said. "You got a poem for us today?"

"Of course," I said. "I always have a poem for those able to see."

"Great." The grey man reached into his pocket, pulled out a roll of bills, and tossed a five into my battered fedora.

"Thank you for your kindness." I looked up into his eyes as he took the flimsy white paper I offered. There was no telling what someone would read in my poems. It all depended on the reader.

The grey man stood on the sidewalk and I watched as he moved his gaze back and forth across the page like a pendulum of an old grandfather's clock. When he finished telling the time of my poem, he glanced down at me. "Thank you," was all he said. I understood, so I just nodded.

The man in grey then handed the poem to the third man while the empty man simply stood and watched, hands in his pockets. The third man quickly scanned the page. "Strange. Really strange."

I wish I knew what he saw, but he gave me no hint.

Then the third man handed my poem to the empty man. The

empty man glanced at it, then flipped it quickly over and glanced at the back before turning it to the correct side again. Just as I had sensed, he could see nothing.

The empty man pretended to read. That's what I had done when I was first given a poem. I watched his light blue eyes and rugged features. "Nice," he finally said to his friends without looking up. Then he folded the poem and stuck it in his jacket pocket. "Now aren't we running late?"

The grey men nodded and the three of them moved off down the sidewalk talking of their business as if the stop with me had not occurred. That was the way of our society. No one paid attention to a beggar on a street corner who wrote poems that shouted at the deaf and splashed color at the blind.

**He would never be  
able to see my poems.  
He was a selfish man.  
He had done nothing  
and given nothing.**

I never expected to see that empty man again. Those who are truly empty will laugh at the blank page and toss it carelessly into a waste basket, not realizing the wealth obvious in the blankness of the sheet. I expected as much from this man.

I was wrong.

He was like I had been. The empty man returned to my street corner at six that evening as I was getting ready to move toward the boarding house where I wrote my poems. It had been a good day giving my poems to the few who were interested

in seeing something of themselves. The empty man who now stood in front of me might have made a thousand dollars during that same period. I used to make that much empty man.

"Poet," the empty man said, reaching into his pocket, pulling out a five, and tossing it into my hat. "I'd like a poem."

I sighed. "Why?"

"Because the sheet you gave me this afternoon had nothing on it."

"So why would you like another?" I could sense his anger. He wanted to prove to himself that I was just a fraud so he could go home to his white-walled world and laugh at the stupidity of his friends.

"You going to give me another poem or do I take my five back?"

"You may have another of my works," I said softly, "with or without your money. But you won't be able to read it."

"I knew it. Charlie was just pulling my leg. There really wasn't anything on that sheet."

"There was a poem there and your friend could read it. I'm not sure, but I think it was a good poem for him to see today."

The empty man nodded. "That's what Charlie said. I gave it back to him and he tried to read parts of it to me, but I couldn't hear him. I could see his lips move, but I couldn't hear a word



he said. Strangest damn thing. Charlie was almost in tears as he read it, too."

I nodded. That was why the empty man had come back. I hadn't been totally wrong. He would have never done it on his own. Not like I did.

"So why didn't I see the poem?" the empty man asked. "Special ink or something?"

"No," I said as I pulled out another poem for him. "Only those who have given can receive."

"Just what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It is your life," I said. "That is for you to decide." I handed him the poem.

He glanced at it, then flipped the sheet over. He could not see the words. I could sense his anger like a fast river behind a very weak dam. He crumpled up the poem and tossed it at my feet.

"You should be arrested for pulling a scam like this," He reached into my hat and took back his five dollars, then stormed up the street, plowing others out of his way with the force of his passage. I picked up the wadded sheet and smoothed out the paper. I had done the same thing. But I had come back the next day and talked to the poet. I doubted if this empty man would return.

Again I was wrong.

He returned late the next afternoon. He nodded an uneasy hello and stood above me staring down at my folder of poems laying on the sidewalk.

Finally, he broke the silence that had formed as a shell around us holding out the noise of the city. "Explain how this works, would you?"

"What are you referring to?" I asked.

"The poems," he said, pointing at my folder. "Why can Charlie see your poems and I can't? I want to know how you do it?"

"I don't do anything," I said. "You can only receive if you have truly given. Very simple, really."

"No, you don't understand. I asked Jim, the other guy that was with me yesterday, what he saw on the page. You know what he said? He said he saw a bunch of scattered words that didn't mean anything. I want to know how you made Charlie see one thing, Jim another, while I couldn't see one damn word. What's the gimmick?"

I shook my head slowly. I could remember having the same feelings. I too had been unable to accept the fact that I was blind. Truly blind. I too looked for any excuse or trick.

"There is no gimmick," I said. "You can only receive if you have given. You have given nothing. Therefore, you cannot see the poem and get what it has to give. I am truly sorry."

I could feel his anger. I expected him to suddenly kick out at me. That is the normal reaction for those who cannot understand something. They strike at it. I expected as much

from the empty man.

Once again he surprised me. With his face red, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a ten dollar bill, and tossed it in my hat. "Give me a poem."

I nodded and handed him the top one in my folder.

He glanced at first one side, then the other, then turned and walked up the street, the poem clutched tightly in his hand.

He returned at the same time the following evening with the grey man. The empty man paid for the poem, looked at both sides of the sheet, then handed it to his friend. The grey man took a long time to read the poem. I could sense it was speaking deeply to him. He finished, then reread the poem slowly. His face was the grayest I had ever seen it. The hurt that so damaged him was obviously moving closer and closer to the surface. One day it would explode into the light and he would be free from it. Scarred but free.

After he finished the second time, he handed the poem back to the empty man and started slowly up the street.

Again, the empty man looked at both sides of the page, then with only a quick questioning glance at me, moved quickly to follow his friend.

For the first time, I began to let myself hope. Not much, but just a drop like a thirsty man getting only a sip of cold water for his first drink. Maybe this empty man would be the one. Maybe he would learn how to give and by doing so, grant me the sight I so needed.

Every evening the empty man came by for a poem. He always gave me five dollars and he could never see the poem. We very

seldom spoke, yet inside him I could sense he was changing. Slowly, fighting every step of the way, he was doing it.

The empty man had no idea how hard his battle was for me to watch. He had no idea how each day I dreaded him not returning. How relieved I was when he did. I so wanted to tell him I had fought the same fight. But I was afraid I would influence the battle. He needed to go the path alone. The only thing I could do was remain the measuring stick he held up to see if he was winning or losing the fight from his emptiness.

Finally, one day, he sat down next to me with his back against the rough wall of the bank.

"Poet," he said, "you've repeated over and over that a person must give before he can receive. Right?"

I nodded.

"So not being able to see your poems has driven me batty. You know that, don't you?"

"I can see that you have become obsessed," I said.

"And I've bought a lot of your empty sheets, haven't I?"

"They were not empty."

He waved his hand. "Whatever. What I'm driving at is I think you owe me a few answers."

"If I can help, I will," I said. I just hoped he didn't ask me

**"You should be arrested for pulling a scam like this." He reached into my hat and took back his five dollars then stormed up the street, plowing others out of his way with the force of his passage.**

for answers I couldn't dare give him.

"Good." He turned to face me. "I've done a lot of thinking since I first got your sheets. You know, I had never given anything to a charity. Not once. But I've changed. Now I give. Every day it's more and more, not counting the money I toss in your hat. I'm giving now, so how come I still can't see your poems?"

"Maybe you're not giving enough," I said softly. I could feel my stomach twist as my words passed across his face. I feared he would not have the strength and turn back into the white room inside himself. If he did so, we would both remain blind. Yet I had no choice. I had to tell him the truth.

"Not enough," he said, his voice again gaining anger. "You want more money from me, is that it? Now I'm starting to see the scam here. You—"

"No," I said. I fought down my own panic and made my voice cold, made my words jab through him with the sharp points of icicles. "From now on, you may have my poems for free. You could have always had them for the asking. I do not want your money. I have no need for money except to buy the paper for my poems and put food in my mouth. Any extra I give away."

"Then I don't understand," he said. "I've given hundreds and hundreds of dollars to charity. What more is there?"

"Only you can find the answer to that question," I said as softly as I could, as if the level of my voice might ease the cutting edge of the truth. I watched the empty man's face and remembered how I felt when the poet had said that to me. I could remember how I had suddenly realized my fight had just begun. I hoped this empty man was as much like me as he appeared and would also understand.

"Damn," he said more to himself than me. He stood and reached out his hand. "May I have a poem?"

I nodded and gave him one. He glanced at both sides of it, then moved slowly up the street. I could sense that he would have a rough night. Like a boat being tossed on a rough sea, he would battle to remain afloat. My only hope is that he would return for another poem tomorrow.

He did. And again the day after and the day after. Every day he told me how much he had given away that day. Every day it became a little more and a little more.

And the pages were always blank to his eyes.

He became my obsession just as I had become his. I talked with him, encouraged him, wrote poems for him that he could not see. The one minute we spent together became the opening and the closing of each of my days. His success was my success. If he failed, I failed. His blindness was my blindness. We became one: Married. A beggar and a businessman.

Finally, as I knew it must, and hoped it would, it ended. He arrived two hours earlier than his normal time and sat down on the sidewalk beside me.

"You know, Poet," he said. "All this time and I don't even know your name."

"Does it really matter?" I said. "I could be anyone."

"But you're not just anyone," he said. "You're the Poet."

We sat there in silence for a short time. I watched the people pass and look down at the empty man with looks of contempt. I could understand what they were thinking. Why would a man in such an obviously expensive suit sit on the sidewalk next to a beggar. Of course, the passersby could only see the surface and not the true roles we played.

"I lost my job," the empty man said softly after a hundred people on the busy sidewalk had passed. "I have given away everything. Everything." His last word sounded like the breath escaping from a corpse.

I nodded, but said nothing. I remembered how I felt at that moment. I too had given everything away. I too lost a job that I felt was the entire world. I did not like the next step. He would

not like it either. But I felt confident he would take it.

Almost five hundred people passed us before he spoke again. "Will I be able to see the words now?"

"No."

"I was afraid of that," he said softly. "Even though I gave everything, I knew it would not be enough."

"It would have never been enough," I said, "because you were never really giving to give. You were giving only to receive."

He sat up and faced me. "What do you mean I never really gave. I gave everything. I just lost my job because I was so obsessed with this insanity. Do you know that everyone I gave one of your poems to

could read it? You said I had to give before I could receive. So I gave. I gave money, time, my job, everything. So why can't I see one of the damn poems?"

"Because you never gave just to give. You were giving only so you could get. That was the difference."

The empty man looked hard at me. I could see in his eyes that he was starting to understand. Truly understand. The knowledge washed over him like a summer shower on a dusty city street. And with the knowledge I watched him step from that simple white room inside himself and lock the door forever. He was still empty, but he was no longer trapped.

After a moment of staring at me, he slumped back against the rough wall of the bank and closed his eyes. I went back to counting the passersby and handing out my poems to the few who wanted to see. It was everything I could do not to jump and shout at the empty man that he had made it. He had succeeded. He had pulled himself free. And if he would just take the next step, he would give us both true sight.

But I said nothing. I simply sat and counted people.

After almost seven hundred passed and I had given away three poems, he sighed and opened his eyes. "What's next?" he asked softly.

**The empty man  
looked hard at me.  
I could see in his  
eyes that he was  
starting to under-  
stand. Truly  
understand.**

I smiled at him. "The world," I said. Then I took a clean piece of paper from the bottom of my folder, one that I had not written on, and handed it to him.

Puzzled, he looked at it and then at the pen I handed him next. "Write a poem," I said, tapping the paper.

"But I can't see the ink or the words," he said after a moment of frustrated scratching on the paper and banging of the pen.

"Neither can I when I write," I said. "But others will be able to see and understand what they need to understand from your words. That is giving." I tapped his paper again. "Write."

I went back to handing out my poems to the few. This time I did not count the passersby. It would be a long time until he would finish his first poem. It is difficult to paint with colors you cannot see, use sounds you cannot hear, or touch emotions you cannot feel.

But I knew he would finish. And when he did, I would finally have a poem to read.



#### THE SOURCE (cont'd from page 18)

After awhile, I saw what looked like green lights moving deep within the pool. Terror made me want to run, but some strange fascination made me stand there, staring down into the depths of "The Source."

"Do you hear that?" my grandfather asked. It was not sound exactly but a faint vibration that seemed to echo in my head. "The minions of Nilremaphisus are chanting. They're tryin' to wake the great beast up. It shouldn't be long, now. Then we'll see who's a crazy old fool!"

"I'm afraid, grampa! Can we leave, now? I believe you, I believe in Nilremaphisus!" I cried as I grabbed my grandfather's arm and tried to drag him away from "The Source."

"Belivin's one thing, seein's another. Don't worry. That star will protect you from any harm."

The crimson water bubbled violently. Large clouds of red, toxic gas rose from the surface of the pool. The chants of Nilremaphisus' minions became deafening. The strange lights were nearing the surface of the water.

As the earth began to quake, my grandfather pushed me away from the hole and shouted, "Behold, Nilremaphisus, The Serpent of the Abyss!"

A huge snake-like head burst forth from the center of "The Source." The head was covered by hundreds of muscular tentacles. Each tentacle ended in a large circular sucker. As the beast rose farther out of the water, I could see that it possessed two pairs of vestigial wings that lay limply against its back.

Unseeing, it stared at me with two huge, useless, green eyes. It must have sensed the protecting necklace, for it suddenly grabbed my grandfather with several of its tentacles. My grandfather's screams became gurgling sounds as the great

beast pulled him beneath the bubbling red water.

I vaguely remember running through the woods, the branches of the dead trees slapping me across the face and arms. My screams blotting out the calls of Nilremaphisus.

The last thing I remember is that my feet became entangled in some vines, and just like in my grandfather's favorite Irish toast, the ground came up to meet me.

My parents and the authorities believe that my grandfather accidentally fell into the pool and drowned. And that all the rest was created by the active imagination of a thirteen-year-old boy, who had listened to too many horror stories from a crazy, old fool. But my grandfather's body was never recovered, and I cannot keep from thinking that it was a good thing that the body did not surface.

Hopefully, Nilremaphisus is once again sleeping. But after a taste of human blood, after so many years, I wonder.

In autumn, when screech owls cry lonely in the night, I sometimes think I hear the strangled moans of an old man and the subtle psychic calls of Nilremaphisus. And I wonder.



#### THE DARK CORNER (cont'd from page 4)

she can squeeze in my raves for "NV9" by Rick Hautaula, James Kisner, and Thomas Tessier.

My overview is simply-stated. I can't recall when I've read a limited anthology—the Paul Mikol series always has three writers plus an "introducer"—wherein the writing trio has crafted more uniformly original fiction. Hautaula's stories and tales "of the Little Brothers" (to use his subtitle to the all-encompassing *Uncigahunk* portion of the "9") are retold myths of the Micmac Indians and nothing is quite like them. Tessier's third of the books is the new novella *The Dreams of Dr. Ladybank*, and F. Paul Wilson, who introduces *Night Visions 9*, is correct in sighting the author's gifts as disturbing and unsettling. You won't soon "forget this story," as Paul said.

But I think the five stories by Kisner are what surprised Wilson and what will both surprise and absolutely delight the readers of this lovely book who haven't yet become aware that James Kisner imagines his short fiction with greater scope, daring, sheer entertainment and yet fidelity to the language than almost any genre writer to emerge as a significant force in the past several years. "The Last Time I Saw Grandma" will astound Kisner readers who are used to his robust scatological presence; it's sensitive, even touching. "Fugyu" has a mind-blowing premise and the finest descriptions of street people I ever expect to read. "Moose Oysters," which made me laugh right out loud, is right behind and all five yarns leave indelible memories.

Since my enthusiasm for the steadily growing Kisner is well known in some circles, let me mention F. Paul's (unsolicited) appraisal—in part—before closing: "He's due for overnight recognition any day now." And, again about Jolting Jim, "The man is a born storyteller." I'm uncertain there's finer or more accurate praise.

# Undying Glamor

by Lois Tilton  
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I was trapped. For days, I'd known they were following me, watching, waiting to trap me when I had to go to ground. I'd been hunted before, but this was different. They seemed to know my movements before I did—they were ahead of me, behind me, everywhere I turned.

And I couldn't hide. The hunger drove me out to hunt whatever the risk. That last night the pangs were making me desperate, cramps wrenching my gut like something alive inside me. I had to have blood, whether they were out there or not.

It was late, the sky to the east was already getting light when I spotted the kid—runaway, huddled under a pile of newspapers in the doorway of an abandoned factory. I caught the sharp scent of fear as she spotted me and froze motionless in her hiding place, but I took a step closer, willing her to look up. It would have to be quick, no screaming—I didn't know how close they were behind me, and this would be my only chance, so close to sunrise. But the glamor was working, her eyes were widening, and she was starting to lean forward toward me, that so-familiar expression on her face, the wanting. I could almost taste the blood, so hot and rich.

I had just reached out my hand to the back of her neck when a police whistle suddenly shrielled—close! no more than a block away! My hold broke, and she backed away on her hands and knees, starting to scream. Then there were sirens, tires shrieking, red and white lights strobing, blinding as they closed in on me.

I ran in the only direction I could, into the factory. Instinct was driving me down, to the basement, the boiler room where the sun couldn't penetrate. But it was a trap, there wasn't another doorway out of the room. No way out.

I panicked then, while a hunger spasm bent me double. This was the end. I was going to die hard, and I knew it, and I was afraid. Hunger and panic were tearing me apart inside.

The door crashed open, the doorway blazed with light, and I flinched, instinctively threw up my arms to cover my eyes. It was after sunrise, and I was afraid to burn. I made up my mind; I was going to try to go through them. Not that I thought I was invulnerable, I knew better than that after all these years, but I'd been shot before and survived. And anything would be better than burning.

But the lights were in my eyes, and I hesitated—it was hard to make out the figures there in the doorway, I wasn't sure how many there were. And why didn't they shoot, why didn't they

get it over with? What were they waiting for?

I almost didn't register the dart when it hit, just a pinprick in my shoulder. Then I looked down, saw it sticking into me, and I jerked it out, threw it onto the floor....

Too late, too late! My vision was blurred. I swayed, I braced myself up into the corner, but they were closing in, and then they had me down on the floor. They shoved a gag into my mouth so I couldn't bite, they pinned my arms back, and I was helpless, and oh, why hadn't I tried it while I still had a chance—it might have been over by now! They were dragging me, they were

going to drag me out into the sun, I was going to burn....

But something was coming down over me, shutting me into the dark—and I stopped struggling, because it was dark and the sun couldn't touch me. I was safe, safe in the dark.

Afterward, in the hospital, it was bad, worse than I could have imagined. The hunger was like something alive inside me, clawing on my guts. But the straps held me down—the straps and the drugs kept me helpless. They had tubes going into me everywhere. All I could move was my head, until I guess they thought I was going to crack it open thrashing the way I was, so they strapped it down, too. Then all I could

do was scream.

I thought at first they were going to let the hunger do it—a long, slow way to go, and maybe burning would have been quicker, after all. I kept screaming for them to get it over with. But then somebody came with a plastic bag filled with dark red, and I knew what it was. He put a tube in my mouth and I drained it, even though the blood was dead and the rancid stale taste of it almost made me gag. But it was blood, no matter what else, and by then I was desperate. Even then the hunger wouldn't go away. It only got worse.

After a while I started to figure out there was a reason for all this, what they were doing to me. They were going to cure me. Oh, and I begged, I cried—let them kill me, quick and clean, let it be over with, I couldn't stand it any more. But no, they were too humane to do something like that. This was all for my own good, and I'd understand when I was well. My condition was a disease. Not my fault, I wasn't responsible. And now science had found a cure.

It was Doctor Juralski who told me. I had a good chance, he said. "You've got a good chance to survive the transition, Jordan. You're physically young, you've got a strong

**This was all for my own good, and I'd understand when I was well. My condition was a disease. Not my fault, I wasn't responsible. And now science had found a cure.**

constitution. I know it's hard, but you can make it."

They knew my name, they knew everything about who I'd been. From my fingerprints, through my army records. The army had me listed as a deserter, but Juralski said I didn't have to worry about things like that anymore. All I had to worry about was getting well.

"It's all a matter of will from now on, Jordan. You've got to want to live, you've got to want to be human again."

And what if I didn't? Did they think ever about that? But after four or five days—though it seemed like a lot longer—the pangs weren't quite so bad. The hunger was fading, and I couldn't swallow the blood anymore. Dead blood—the smell of it made me want to puke. It was the same way with any kind of food, though—I just couldn't keep it down.

That worried Juralski. "You've got to start eating," he said.

"What if I don't? Will I die?" More than a little bitterness in my voice. After all, that's what their cure really meant, that eventually I'd have to die.

"It's called the human condition," he snapped. "You'd better get used to it again."

But I never had deluded myself into thinking I was immortal—not really. I knew all along that they were going to get me sooner or later. I just hadn't known it was going to be like this.

"So what happens now?" I asked him once they let me out of the restraints.

"That's up to you. Physically, you're cured. You're not a danger to people anymore—no more than anyone else. How about it? Do you really think you still need the blood?"

My stomach heaved at the thought of the rancid, congealing liquid in the plastic bags. Oh, it was nothing like the sweet, hot rush of the real thing, pumping into my mouth from a living heart. But it was true, the hunger was gone, the awful, wrenching cramps. Was it worth it? How could I know?

The choice wasn't up to me, anyway. Juralski had made that clear. And I could see for myself that I was changing. My teeth were coming loose—my fangs, I suppose, if you want to call them that. My reflexes were going, and my senses. I felt blind, deaf, numb. How could I be a danger to anybody?

I finally made myself look in the mirror, for the first time in forty years with human eyes. The image was blurred at first, but I blinked my eyes and focused hard. I looked bad. Thin, way too thin. Haggard, wasted. But—not old. How old was I, anyway? Eighteen, or almost sixty? I curled my lips, exposing the fangs. Was this what a vampire looked like? Was this what it was all about?

I was kind of afraid, then, staring at myself. I rubbed my face, wondering if I'd have to start shaving again. Juralski was always reminding me that the treatment was irreversible.

One of my fangs was wobbly. I took hold of it with my

fingers and gave it a yank. Thin warm blood filled my mouth, and I spit it into the sink, fighting hard not to retch. When the spasm was over I leaned against the sink and probed the empty socket with my tongue. Would another one grow in?

At least the hunger was gone, at least I'd never have to go through that again, never feel those claws in my gut, the blood-lust. Maybe it would be worth it, I thought. Maybe it would be all right.

They let me go, finally. After about a year of sessions with the shrink, and the judge, and the probation office. I was capable of adjusting to a normal life, was what they said. After all, I hadn't been responsible for what I'd done. It was the disease. They even gave me Disability payments—that's what they called my condition, a disability.

Not that they trusted me, not really. I was on probation. The

guy came to check up on me every week. Looking for bodies in the closet, I guess. And they were watching me. I hated being watched, couldn't stand it, people knowing what I was, where I lived. I'd been in hiding for too long. I could tell how it was going to be for the rest of my life. They'd drag me in every time there was a murder, make me account for every second. *Where were you at 3:00 a.m. on the night of February 28?*

Whenever I went out I could feel their eyes, following me. But mostly, I stayed inside. Always, in the daytime. Oh, I knew I wasn't going to burn, but the old habits were too strong.

It was the guy across the courtyard.

Watching, always watching. I could see him in the window, standing there, staring across at my apartment. I tried to keep the blinds closed, keep it dark inside, but the probation agent didn't like that. He said I should get out, outside in the daytime, get to know people—work harder to adjust. "You know what Doctor Juralski told you. Remember—we can always put you back in the hospital."

Locked up for the rest of my life. Yeah, I know, maybe it would have been the best thing. I know that now. But I was scared, I didn't want to go back to that place.

Not that the neighborhood was much better. It was a dumping ground, built where they'd bulldozed down the old projects. I wasn't the only one on Disability, that was for sure. Lots of guys on drug maintenance, with that dull look in their eyes, you know, you've seen it.

But the guy across the courtyard, he was different. OK, it all started one night, just after sundown, when I wanted to get outside, out of the apartment, take a walk, go somewhere I didn't have to stare at those four walls. I could see him in the window—he was still watching me, standing there with the lights out. I almost couldn't see him in the dark. You know, that's the part of it I really miss—the vision, how sharp all my

**You know, that's the part of it I really miss—the vision, how sharp all my senses used to be. You can't imagine how clear everything was in the dark, the way the air was so rich, full of scents.**

senses used to be. You can't imagine how clear everything was in the dark, the way the air was so rich, full of scents. If it was worth it, being like I was, that was the reason. Not the blood.

Anyway, I waited until he was gone from the window, then I stepped outside and started across the courtyard, to the street, but oh, shit, there he was, coming out his door. I almost turned to go the other way, but what the hell, maybe he was some kind of undercover probation officer—I didn't know—so at the last second I decided to stick it out, get it over with.

He said, "Hi! My name's Del Merrick. You're new around here, aren't you? Just move in?"

He was around thirty, sandy hair, kind of a meso build, friendly grin, friendly hand stuck out in my direction. I took it after a few seconds, remembering how I could touch other people now without them feeling how cold my skin was. The probation guy would have been proud of me, I was thinking.

"Jordan Manchester," I said. It felt weird, giving somebody my real name, having it back.

"You work around here?"

I shook my head. I didn't want to say I was living on Disability, no matter how much they said it wasn't supposed to be my fault.

But Merrick didn't seem to care. "Hey, well, you're lucky, you got one of the ground floor units, don't have to climb up three flights."

"Yeah. I guess so." Well, what was I supposed to say? What did this guy want?

"Look, there's a place on the next block, I was just going around for a beer. It's Friday night, right? How about it?"

I shook my head automatically, but then I thought, maybe this was another way they were checking up on me, see if I was adjusting. Hell, maybe I'd need an alibi for 9:00 p.m. of April 30. And a beer sounded good. It really did.

"I guess so," was all I could think of to say, but Merrick did enough talking for the both of us. He led the way to the bar, going on about his work as a writer, how he spent all day indoors in front of a keyboard, but the hours were great, you could take off for a beer or two without the boss on your tick about it.

It wasn't until the bartender put my glass down on the table in front of me and said, "That'll be five," that I realized I'd left my wallet back in the apartment. But Merrick just grinned and reached into his own pocket. He threw a ten down on the table. "Hey, it's on me, all right? Welcome to the neighborhood."

The beer tasted good and it wasn't too cold. I sipped it slowly, half-listening to Merrick's complaints about his agent. I was still having trouble with food, keeping it down, but beer was OK. So I finished one and then had another, letting Merrick pay.

I thought maybe I was doing all right. This was a bar, after all. Bars had always been a good place to hunt, darker ones, mostly, where everyone was a stranger. It'd been easy. I'd take

a table, or a booth if they had them, back in a dark corner. Order a drink, let it sit there while I picked my victim, someone alone, someone with a hollow place in his soul. I know, that sounds dumb, but that's how it felt. A kind of an emptiness, a need. Then all I had to do was meet their eyes. The glamor did the rest. When it really connected, all I had to do was look in their direction, and they couldn't take their eyes off me.

What happened next—sometimes I followed them, sometimes they'd follow me. Outside into an alley where it was quiet and dark, if I had my way, but some guys would head for the Men's room if it was sex they had on their minds. Lots of times it was. Sometimes they still wanted it when they got a good look at me, saw what I was, and sometimes they were afraid, but it didn't make any difference, not once I had the hold on them. Men, women—it worked either way.

Suddenly, drinking my beer, I glanced over at Merrick, and I froze with the glass half-way to my mouth. The look in his eyes, that same familiar look, wanting it... But no, it couldn't be. Not anymore. I was *cured!*

Then I realized when I'd seen the look before—all those subtle glances, the gestures, the almost-accidental touches. A secret language for the ones who knew what to look for, who wanted the same thing. The ones who would lead me into the Men's room. That was what Merrick wanted. And I thought no, I couldn't do it, I wasn't ready for sex, it had been too long.

I was going to tell him, "Sorry, no offense, all right, but no thanks." But he wasn't making any kind of overt moves, putting his hand on my crotch or anything like that, so I just drank down my beer and got up from the table.

"Look, I've got to go."

"Hey, we just got here!"

"Well, another time, maybe. I'll buy, all right?"

I escaped, back to the apartment. Back into the dark. Sex—oh God, how long had it been? Desperately, I unzipped my pants, put my hand around my cock, but nothing happened. Like always, nothing happened. That part of me hadn't ever come back to life.

I threw myself down face-first onto the bed. So many years. After a while I hadn't missed it, not when I had the other thing, the blood. I could still remember the taste of it, and the rush, even better than dope, better than sex. But now I was cured. Like Jraliski said, irreversibly. I couldn't be reinfected. I could never get it back. As for sex, well that was sometimes a problem his patients had, adjusting. He didn't seem to think it was such a big deal. I'd never asked if there were any other problems. Adjusting.

Yeah, I know, I guess I should have asked.

Merrick kept after me. He came over again the next night, Saturday night, and I remembered that I'd promised to buy the

**Bars had always been a good place to hunt, darker ones, mostly, where everyone was a stranger. It'd been easy.**

beers the next time. Merrick worked late, he said, and he slept late in the morning—you could do that kind of thing when you made your own hours. I ought to understand, I slept late too, didn't I?

It was like he was probing for something, but I didn't answer, and he dropped the subject—for then. But he kept showing up, usually with a six-pack in his hand. He made me edgy. I never knew if he was going to come on to me this time or what. He had that way, you know, of watching me when my back was half-turned. I could *feel* the touch of his eyes. I still wasn't sure if it was the sex thing or if he was somebody from the probation department, the way he seemed to know about me, the little hints he kept dropping about sleeping late and going out after dark.

I couldn't seem to get rid of him, and he was somebody to talk to, after all. I needed to talk to somebody, once in a while. I tried to keep the subject neutral, asking him about the kind of stuff he wrote.

"Oh, you know, whatever the markets are buying." He paused, he gave me one of those looks. "Horror novels, sometimes. You like that kind of thing? You know, werewolves..."

The word, the word he didn't say, hung in the air between us.

"No. Not really," I said shortly.

He didn't press the issue, not that time, but he was back the next weekend and every couple of nights after that. Then one Saturday he showed up with a package wrapped in white paper. He put it down on the kitchen counter and stuck his head into my refrigerator. "Shit, don't you ever have any food in this place? Here, have a beer." He tossed me a can, took one for himself, popped it open. Beer, at least, I had plenty of.

It was a warm day for late spring, and he was wearing shorts and a tank top, real tight, you know. He gave me one of those grins, like there was a secret we were sharing, something between us.

"Here, look what I brought over." He was unwrapping the package. I thought I knew what it was, and I backed away a step, but he suddenly shoved it at me. "How do you like it?"

I gagged at the dead-meat smell. Rancid blood had oozed out of the cut surface of the steak and pooled in the bottom of the foam plastic tray. I turned around and bent over the sink, stomach heaving.

"Hey, what's the matter? Don't tell me you're some kind of vegetarian?"

"Yeah, I guess maybe I am," I mumbled.

He roughly wrapped up the steak again and stuck it into the refrigerator. "Look, you don't have to pretend with me. I know what you are."

It was suddenly hard to breathe, like I was suffocating. "I don't know what you're talking about. I... was sick a while

back, it did something to my appetite."

"Yeah, and I know what you were sick with, too. Come on! Dammit, Jordan, I've been watching you—you don't eat, you only go out at night, you look like walking death. Look, you don't have to hide it! I'm not afraid!"

I wiped my face and straightened up, faced him. "I'm not hiding anything. What you're talking about—it's over. I'm... cured. The doctors told me so."

But he just gave me one of those grins. "Yeah, I figured that, too. Makes it even better, doesn't it?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Look, I'm a writer, I know about this stuff! I do my research, you know. If you're cured, you can't pass it on anymore—the virus. It's safe! So what's your problem?"

I just shook my head. Shit, he probably knew more about it than I did. Except he didn't know quite enough.

He came up closer to me. Too close. "Come on, Jordan! I'm telling you, it's all right! I know what you want, and it's all right!"

I backed away. Something in my chest felt too tight, too hot.

But he wouldn't stop. "Don't you understand? Don't you *see*? I want it, too! I've waited for this—you don't know how long I've waited! From the first minute I saw you! I *knew*! I watched you! I kept hoping you'd see me, notice me."

I shoved him back. "Get away from me! You don't know what you're talking about!"

Because of course I knew what it was with him by then. He was one of the empty ones, the hollow ones. How many times I'd seen them come to me, that look on their faces, eyes wide, arms open, chins tilted up high. Oh yes, they knew, they wanted it, they wanted me. They wanted my lips on their throats, my fangs piercing their veins, taking their blood, so slow, so sweet, so good. It was the glamor working on them, promising them something to fill the empty aching inside them.

But the glamor was a lie. It's always been a lie. All those books, the books they write, those guys like Merrick—that's only what they want to believe.

I knew the real thing, and it was the hunger wrenching at my gut and my fangs ripping open their throats and the blood spraying everywhere while they kicked and thrashed and choked and died.

But Merrick didn't believe me. He spun around, jerked open a drawer and grabbed out a kitchen knife. "Is it the fangs? We don't need those. See?"

"No!" I tried to stop him, tried to grab the knife before it was too late, but he just grinned and sliced the blade down across his finger, a deep cut, almost down to the bone, and the blood welled out, thick dark rich crimson, dripping onto the floor. He

(Continued on page 39)

**I gagged at the dead meat smell....**

**"Hey, what's the matter? Don't tell me you're some kind of vegetarian?"**

# END GAME

by Chris Walter  
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Charles Farley crouched at the top of the stairs and clenched a baseball bat, certain that something stalked him in his darkened Manhattan apartment.

The initial sound awakened him a few minutes ago. At first it sounded like the old brownstone groaning again. The building occasionally shuddered, loosing subaural moans like those made by massive, warring tectonic plates grinding against each other. Farley dismissed his original unease and went back to sleep. The second sound did *not* come from the brownstone.

He quietly eased into a sitting position on his bed and stared at the stairs from the living room to his loft bedroom, listening for a telltale creak from the fifth and sixth steps. Nothing, no squeaking stairs, no furtive shadows cast against the wall by the downstairs night light.

His intuition accused Sharon of sneaking back in after last week's cataclysmic blowup. Damn bitch! Then he remembered that he'd changed the locks when she deserted him. Besides, she lacked the courage to return and confront him.

If it wasn't Sharon, it had to be his imagination—or a burglar. He swung his legs out of bed and stood up, inhaling through his mouth to quiet the noise of his breathing, and listened for the intruder in his home. He crept along the wall toward the top of the stairs, keeping one hand on its rough plaster and stepping around loose floorboards. His heart beat with a smooth, thudding rhythm, idling in anticipation of something, something—and he had it. He wanted—no, he lusted—to kill the cretin that was so stupid it had to resort to thievery to survive. He wanted to reduce the great, rolling, inferior mass of the human race by one poor specimen. Charles Farley resented being the intellectual equivalent of a sighted person in the land of the blind, existing off niggardly handouts and being ridiculed by mean, piggish little minds.

He slinked past the window air-conditioner and shivered when a blast of cold air hit his groin, shrinking his balls until they throbbed with a low aching pain. The sound came again when he reached the top of the stairs.

Bee-bee-beeee.... bop. Beep, beep, beep.

It sounded more like a digital watch alarm than a prowling burglar. Farley pinpointed the source of the sound. He flicked the lights on and descended the stairs.

The package sat on the dining room table where he left it this afternoon. The return address read Arelco Marketing Services, Inc., undoubtedly another chess game manufacturer hoping for an endorsement from Charles Farley, World Champion. He

hated the endless commercialism, endorsements, demonstration games and talk show appearances; all of the incessant money grubbing forced upon him so he could survive to ply his art.

Motherfucking Russians had thousands of chess players on their national payroll! Those with a world rating lived in virtual luxury, free to perfect their skills. And he, who could beat them all, had to debase himself to survive. Farley reached down and massaged his tightening stomach muscles until some of his rage seeped away.

**The return address read Arelco Marketing Services Inc., undoubtedly another chess game manufacturer hoping for an endorsement from Charles Farley.**

He ripped the package open and read the enclosed letter. It confirmed that Arelco wanted their product tested along with an "evaluation" report for their use, subject to editing, as they saw fit. The game was just like that played by publishers who excerpted one laudatory line in a scathing book review and plastered that line on the jackets of their books. But what the hell, even geniuses need to eat and as long as the check was big enough, he'd do it. He read on. The check was sufficient (a modest stipend for his technical evaluation, it said; he'd go along with the lie) and the game's description didn't look too fatuous. The letter mentioned meeting him during his record breaking simultaneous chess match at the Carolina Hotel. He wracked his memory for a face to match the

name of Arelco's president, thinking back to that day and recalling....

And recalling his bad mood that day. Sharon threw a fit when he refused to make love the night before and stomped out, forcing him to grab a stale Danish from a corner coffee shop run by some greasy Arabs. The cab smelled of stale vomit and worse, or maybe it was the cabbie; he was grateful when the cab reached the Carolina Hotel. The fare came to \$9.80; Farley told the cabbie to keep the change from a ten.

He hurried up the granite steps to the lobby where Herman Worth, the president of the Greater Manhattan Chess Club, waited to greet him. Worth was a pretentious little hacker who could barely remember the opening moves for the Indian Defense, let alone having perfect recall of every championship game played in the past two centuries, the bare minimum for the serious competitor, in Farley's estimation. He smiled at the little asshole and quietly endured his familiar manner and obsequious arm touching, as if he thought Farley were some kind of talisman.

The thirty-three challengers stood and applauded when Worth introduced him.

"Thank you, one and all for coming here for a friendly little



chess match," he began and waited politely for the crowd's laughter and murmurs to subside.

"As you know, I will be playing thirty-three simultaneous games against some of the finest chess players in New York City. In order to even the odds somewhat, I will play white on each board. Of course, no one should collaborate with his neighbor. We wouldn't want anyone to claim that you beat me unfairly, would we?"

The crowd laughed again, pleased with its new found camaraderie with the world's greatest chess champion. Farley quickly opened on each board with a pawn to queen four. Most players responded with the knight to king's bishop three, the classic Nimzo-Indian Defense in which the king's bishop diagonal opens, allowing an early checking attack and the possibility of doubling white's queen-side pawns. Farley again advanced his queen's pawn to disrupt the opponent's rhythm and, on most boards, captured the king's pawn *en passant*. He then took the black queen when his pawn was captured, forcing the black king to capture his attacking queen and forfeit castling. A marginal move at best, it served, when coupled with the pressure of playing the world champion, to unnervingly frustrate his opponents. He used it against each competitor except for the well dressed man sitting at the end table.

He looked about thirty-five, short and slim and dressed in a dark blue Brooks Brothers suit tailored perfectly to his slight build. His carefully barbered hair showed a slight touch of grey at the temples; it matched his deep tan perfectly. He sat before an exquisite green and white marble chess board with matching pieces. The board must be framed in gold; gold plate wouldn't satisfy this dabbler. Each piece was adorned in gleaming gold while stones that he could not identify had been used for the eyes of the knights, bishops, queens and kings. The man's shirt was a slightly off-white color and he wore this year's Yuppie power tie. All in all, it looked very good on him. That angered Farley. That and his stupid opening move.

The Yuppie moved his knight to queen's bishop three, a fairly useless move, and Farley decided to humiliate him. He moved his pawn to king three; his opponent mirrored this move by the time Farley cycled through the other thirty-two chess boards. Farley moved his bishop to queen's bishop four and the middle-aged Yuppie responded with pawn capturing pawn. Farley sent his queen to king's bishop three, lining it on the king's file like a gunshot. Incredibly, the Brooks Brothers suit didn't notice this impending fool's mate and ran his bishop to queen's knight five, placing white in check. Farley couldn't believe his eyes when he returned to the man's board. He blocked with his knight and when the black pawn captured his knight, his queen, protected by his bishop, captured the pawn next to the black king and checkmated him.

"You don't deserve to own a chess board, let alone one as beautiful as that one. You're a stupid player and a disgrace to

the game. Get out of here and don't let me see you ever again."

The Yuppie just stared at his precious little board as if a snake had crawled out from under it. He blushed a brilliant red and muttered unintelligibly under his breath before running from the hotel lobby.

Good old ass-kissing Herman Worth worried after him, wringing his hands and anxiously swiveling his head between Farley and the Yuppie. The club president identified him later as Arelco Marketing's president, the man whose letter Farley now read in the middle of the night.

Farley's sleep was ruined and he knew it. That damn burglar scare put him on edge and he couldn't fall asleep again. He opened the inner carton and removed the electronic chess game, setting it on his naked lap. Its on-off switch was conveniently located; Farley noted that positive feature. The black and gray board and pieces pleased the eye.

Pretty standard construction, he thought. Let's see how she

plays. He flicked the power switch on and a synthesized voice spoke to him.

"The Arelco Chess Warrior is designed for competitors seeking new and exciting challenges, including the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Unlike other models, the Chess Warrior only has one level of play: Grandmaster. To enter your first move, press the desired chess piece and then its destination. Pressure sensors will record your move. Warning! This model is for serious players who are willing to suffer the consequences of poor play. This is your last chance to refuse the Arelco Chess Warrior's challenge."

Cute, he thought. He opened with pawn to queen four.

Something jabbed into each thigh and his groin, not terribly uncomfortable but annoying just the same. Farley started to raise the chess board from his lap when a severe electric shock convulsed him. He dimly heard the synthesized voice warning him and someone sobbing nearby. He tried to tell the other person to shut up when he realized that the moans were his own. That emotional jolt allowed the Chess Warrior warnings to penetrate his trauma-induced fog.

"The Chess Warrior cannot be disengaged before game completion without risking severe injury or death to the player. Do not—repeat—do not attempt to remove the wire electrodes embedded in your skin. Do not attempt to disable the unit. Failure to obey these instructions may result in a fatal shock. It's your move."

"You can't do this to me! Don't you know who I am?"

Farley fearfully clutched at the board, squeezing it with both hands until an internal sensor's pressure limits were exceeded. One hundred volts shot through the machine's tiny electrodes and crackled between his legs. His head snapped back in agony as his back arched with uncontrollable spasms.

"Do not attempt to disable this unit. Failure to obey may result in a fatal shock. It's your move."

"Fuck you, you sonuvabitch! Fuck you, fuck you, fuck

**"You don't deserve to own a chess board, let alone one as beautiful as that one. You're a stupid player and a disgrace to the game. Get out of here and don't let me see you ever again."**

you!"

As he screamed, a quieter part of his mind intruded, counseling that patience and reasoning would get him out of this alive. But he just couldn't make his body obey that tiny voice of reason. He just sat there, frozen to his dining room chair, afraid to move.

"You must make a move every minute. You have twenty seconds left to make your first move."

"This can't be happening to me; no God, please-save-me-I'll-never-do-anything-bad-again, please God, please!"

"You have ten seconds to make a move. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Make your move."

"No, no, noooooo!"

Two hundred volts slammed into his trembling flesh. His teeth chewed through his lower lip; blood gushed from it and streamed across his chin and dripped steadily into his lap, improving the electrical connection. The stink of cooking flesh mingled with the acid stench of urine spraying against hot electrodes. The Chess Warrior started the next countdown.

"You have one minute to make your next move. Failure to make a move may result in a fatal shock. It's your move."

He reached out and shakily pressed a pawn until the board beeped and moved it to queen's bishop four. The machine immediately countered with a pawn to king three. Farley recognized the classic Nimzo-Indian Defense and his fear eased. Farley moved his knight to queen's bishop three; the Chess Warrior advanced his bishop to queen's knight five. He played the classical line, allowing his opponent's black bishop to penetrate to where his knight blocked its checking action. He'd have a set of doubled pawns if the bishop captured his knight, an inherently weak structure since two pawns on the same file could not protect each other. Farley knew that line of play and always overcame the disadvantage. But when the machine's bishop predictably captured his knight, he felt a greater disadvantage than doubled pawns.

"Ahhhhhhhh!"

A blinding flare of electricity bolted through his body when he lost his knight. The machine was counting down again when he regained consciousness.

"Remember that the loss of a piece will result in a potentially fatal shock. Loss of strategically important pieces will result in correspondingly greater shocks. You have ten seconds to make your next move."

"No, please. I've had enough. Please don't hurt me anymore."

"Nine..."

"I'll do anything, please, don't."

"Six..."

"No!"

"Five..."

Farley moved his knight to king's bishop three.

The Chess Warrior moved a knight to king five.

Farley nodded off from exhaustion and the onset of shock; he moved his bishop to king's knight five just in time to sidestep a shock but not in time to avoid...

Knight captures bishop!

Three hundred volts knocked him into oblivion.

He regained consciousness only because the Chess Warrior gently jolted him with low grade electrical shocks while admonishing him to wake up and make his next move.

"You have one minute to make a move," it intoned when it sensed that he was once more fully alert.

Charles Farley, world chess champion, waited, subdued, while the Chess Warrior continued the countdown. No matter what he did, he had lost a major piece and his queen side pawn structure was decimated. His king side pawns were about to be doubled and he might have to exchange queens with his mechanical opponent, a terrible blow that would make the bishop's loss even more significant.

"You have ten seconds to make a move. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five..."

Charles Farley turned his king over on its side, signifying forfeiture of the game.

"You're a stupid player and disgrace the game of chess. You do not deserve mercy. You have one minute to live."

But Charles Farley was well past caring.

The police questioned Sharon at length, first suspiciously because Farley had thrown her out in the street after a loud argument. Then they learned that he changed the locks and there were no signs of forcible entry, although the fire that

gutted the apartment could have hidden such signs. In fact, the fire consumed most of Charles Farley. Besides that, Sharon seemed too gentle to harm anyone, almost too gentle to protect herself. She did speculate that everyone who knew Farley hated him and no one would miss him.

She was wrong on that count. The president of the Greater Manhattan Chess Club moaned his grief in public and told all who'd listen, and many who wouldn't, that Charles Farley was the greatest chess master who ever lived and how he unselfishly helped developing players—even a pretentious little hacker who could barely remember the initial opening moves for the Indian Defense, let alone the details of every championship game played in the past two centuries.

**His teeth chewed through his lower lip; blood gushed from it and streamed across his chin and dripped steadily into his lap improving the electrical connection.**

2025



1991-1992

# Coppice

by Duncan Adams

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Whenever I acquire a piece of woodland, I make it a point to ply the locals in the nearest hostelry. It often saves misunderstandings about public footpaths, bridleways, and a hundred other things that can otherwise alienate me from my neighbors. So I bought the usual round of drinks, mentioned who I was, then awaited comments.

"Young Joe won't be happy," one of the farmers said. "Does most of his werrchin' in yon wood."

And so it went on until I mentioned Amos Halstead. Amos lived in a cottage in the center of the thousand acre forest, and the cottage had gone with the land, so I now owned it. Amos was a tenant for life on a peppercorn rent, so it was natural I would want to know about him. All I got was the comment that he might be a witch, then silence. They obviously didn't want to talk about him, so I didn't pursue it.

The following morning, I decided to visit my tenant. I strode along the forest path thinking uneasily of the muttered words in the *Green Dragon*: "There's some say he's a witch..." But it was a sunny day, and it was easy to put such thoughts aside.

There was no actual garden to the cottage. It sat tiny and crumbling amongst the trees, its paint long peeled away and its slates askew. For a moment I wondered whether or not I would be responsible for the repairs, then I realized I would. It was just one more reason why I needed to keep the old man sweet. Tenants on peppercorn rents could be bad news.

The door was unfashioned and stood ajar by about two inches. I rapped with my knuckles. Nothing. "Hello," I called through the chink. Nothing.

Cautiously opening the door, I peered into the gloom and called again. There was none of the impedimenta I associated with witchcraft like bubbling cauldrons or broomsticks. It was clean, tidy, and spartan. The only clutter was caused by bunches of herbs hanging from the sagging beams, and a jumble of logs by the fireplace. A rack held a dozen or so twisted walking sticks, a couple of them with deer antler handles. "Mr. Halstead," I called. Nothing. I hung around outside for a few minutes, then started back.

If there's one thing I hate about forestry, it's squirrels. Children think of them as cuddly little friends, but they're my deadliest enemies. They strip the bark from trees, eat growing shoots, and steal seeds that would otherwise have naturally regenerated. Worse, they are hard to trap, expensive to poison,

and incredible when you do get them. Useless, expensive, ruinous creatures.

As I walked back towards my car, I became aware of more and more squirrels around me. At one time, I was sure I had a dozen in sight all at the same time, and up 'til then I'd only seen four or five all day. Of course I didn't have my shotgun; I never had the gun when it was needed.

"You'll be the new owner, then."

The words seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere. Then I saw him, sitting a few feet off the path on a tree stump, squirrels around his feet as he tossed tidbits to them. A wrinkled

face with rheumy eyes sat atop the bundle of rags that contained his slight frame.

"Amos Halstead?" I asked, holding out my hand. He nodded and took the offered hand, his grip surprisingly firm.

"I went to the cottage," I said, feeling foolish for no good reason. He seemed more at home in my forest than I was, yet his gaze made me feel like an intruder.

"It needs repairing," said Amos. Then he must have seen the alarm in my face because he added, "but don't you be worrying about it. I don't pay enough rent to be expectin' repairs."

"I'd be grateful if you wouldn't encourage the squirrels, Mr. Halstead," I said, recovering my composure. "They do

a lot of damage."

"Do they?" he raised his eyebrows and his lips tipped a toothless smile at me. "And how much damage do you intend doing, young man?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean, what's your plan for this forest? Or shall I guess?"

I wanted to tell him it was none of his damned business, but he lived in the wood, so my plans materially affected him. I held my tongue.

"Let me guess then," he said quietly. "I'll bet you bought the place for a song... paid a hundred pounds an acre, or less..."

"Ninety five," I said, then wondered why I'd said it. It was none of his business.

"So you've got an investment of around a hundred thousand pounds," said Amos casually, as though a hundred grand meant nothing to him. "You got it cheap because it's mostly coppice, and the timber isn't worth much. You intend clear felling everything in sight, then replanting with conifers. Sitka spruce to be precise."

"How did you know it was sitka?" I asked, amazed at his accuracy.

**If there's one thing  
I hate about forestry,  
it's squirrels. Children  
think of them as  
cuddly little friends,  
but they're my dead-  
liest enemies.**

"Don't do it, son," he said, ignoring my question.

"I've got to do it," I said quickly.

"Yes, I suppose you *would* see it that way," said Amos slowly as he picked up one of the squirrels and began stroking its head. "If you borrowed that sort of money from the bank, you'd need to do something drastic. You could get a couple of thousand tons of chip out of here, perhaps five or six hundred cubes of staking material... you could just about break even on the clear fell. Then the planting won't cost you anything because you'll get a grant, and you should be able to resell at around two hundred pounds an acre, probably more. You'll make quite a killing, son."

"And what's wrong with that?" I said defensively. The man was *too* accurate for comfort.

"Look around you," he said, extending his hands. "Look at the finches, the tits, the flowers, the butterflies. Get on your knees and look at the insects. Plant conifers, and there'll be nothing. A bit of ground ivy, perhaps. A thousand acres of beauty gone at a stroke."

"But it's rubbish," I protested. "It's all worthless coppice!"

"Not rubbish!" The old man's voice rose, his anger matching mine. For a moment he stood, waving a long, thin finger at me, then he calmed himself and sat on the stump again. "Do you know the history of this forest?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"It was once part of a great estate," he said, his eyes focusing far beyond me. "My father, and his father before him... they were all foresters here. And so was I, until the war. They sent me off to fight the Germans. When I got back, the estate had been split up, and the forest had been bought by a timber merchant. He clear felled everything... for the war effort, he said..."

"Exactly," I interrupted. "That's when the damage was done. I'm just tidying up!"

"No you're not," Amos shook his head decisively. "When I went to war, this forest was proud with mighty oak, ash and chestnut. When I returned, there were only stumps. But the stumps lived, and they coppiced..."

"So now we've got a mess," I interrupted again. "Each stump has given rise to a dozen or more shoots, and none of them will ever amount to anything..."

"Forty years have passed," said Amos patiently. "Look at that ash behind you. There are seven stems coming out of the one stump. The one on the right's a good eight inches in diameter, and it's as straight as can be. Fell the six others, but keep the main one. That way you don't need the conifers."

"Have you any idea what that would cost?" I asked, agitated at the thought. "Clear felling is expensive enough, but selective thinning's crippling... and I wouldn't get the same tonnage off... all the best would be left behind..."

"It's the only way, son," he said. "I tried to convince the last

owner, but he wouldn't listen."

"What do you mean?" I asked as tiny fingers ran up my spine. I'd never had a straight answer when I'd tried to find out why the forest was so cheap, but cheap would be horrendously expensive if anything stood in the way of my clear fell.

"I've watched this forest struggle back to life for the past forty years," he said, choosing his words carefully. "Deer have started coming in again, just like the old days. I've only been one frail pair of hands, but I've helped a little. And I know... don't laugh at me... I know God's pleased. He won't want conifers here, not now. God won't let you do it, young man!"

"Listen," I said, deciding it was time to be firm, "I don't believe in that stuff. In the village, they say you're a witch, and I don't mind a bit of good old healthy superstition, but witchcraft and forestry don't exist in the same dimension. I'm talking about chainsaws and forwarders... big tackle!"

"God's big tackle too," said Amos quietly. "Don't tangle with Him, son. Be good to this forest, and it'll be good to you. Do as I've suggested, and you'll get an income from it, without raping it. And now I bid you good day."

I wanted to shout after him that he'd get a writ the instant he interfered, but my mouth seemed welded shut. An old man determined to protect a forest could be bad news, but if the worst came to the worst, the courts would deal with him. The law said I was entitled to clear fell, and so did the licence in my pocket. What could he do? Nothing.

I was on site myself when cutters moved in. Twenty men each armed with a chain saw, a combi can of petrol and oil, and a spray can of bluey to prevent rot in the stumps, descended like refugees from a hornet's nest.

Amos was there, sitting quietly in the grass, not getting in the way, and watching. They dropped ten acres that day. I had firestacks of chip and stakes waiting for the forwarder, and flies crackled where the waste branches were burning. It was a good first day.

But Amos pricked my conscience, and as the last cutter climbed into his Land Rover, I went over to the old man. "I'm sorry, truly I am," I said, and I meant it because I too favored conservation, provided it didn't empty my wallet.

"Sun's going to be hot tomorrow," he said as he carefully freed an unidentifiable insect from a spider's web.

"Yes..."

"That chip'll lose weight if you don't get it away," he said casually.

"I know," I said, irritated the man should tell me my job. "The forwarder's arriving in the morning, and the first HGV in the afternoon. No problem. The timber will be in the mill before it closes."

"God willing," Amos smiled.

**"It was once part of a great estate," he said, his eyes focusing far beyond me. "My father, and his father before him... they were all foresters here. And so was I..."**

"Yes "I snapped. "And I'm sure he *will* be."

The forwarder rolled off the low-loader at eight-thirty the following morning. It was my latest investment, and I was very proud of it. A massive four wheel drive tractor was hitched to a ten ton trailer, the hydraulic grab gleaming with oil and steel. I watched as my operator checked the fluid levels, then belched the diesel into noisy, black smoked life.

With satisfaction, I saw Amos was sitting in the same place when the forwarder began to move. The huge wheels traversed the stumps as though they were nothing, the grab reached down, picked up chip logs as though they were match sticks, then stacked them neatly in the trailer. When the full ten tons were on board, it headed back to the road, where it stacked them. I looked at my watch—eleven-fifteen—another ten ton load, and that would be a full twenty tons waiting for the HGV to take to the mill.

My reverie was broken by the sound of the forwarder's engine cutting out. When I looked up, I saw the driver climbing out of the cab and then peering up at the grab. "Not already," I muttered under my breath. I had often heard it said that forestry consisted of "brief bursts of activity between the breakdowns," and I knew it was true, but not with a brand new forwarder.

"Hydraulics have gone," he said pointing up at the mass of heavy-duty flexible rubber hoses that fed the grab with power. Dripping fluid lent truth to his words.

"Plenty of spares "I reminded him.

I watched, hardly paying any attention, as he *stripped off the damaged hose, tossed it away, and fitted a new one.* Ten minutes later, he was replacing it again. "This is ridiculous," I said.

When the third hose went, I became suspicious. Cutting hoses was standard sabotage, but no one had been near them, especially Amos who hadn't moved all morning from his grassy knoll. And the forwarder had been garaged overnight, so one could have got at it then.

I actually saw the fourth hose go because I was sitting on the roof of the cab watching them carefully. There were no surrounding trees because they'd all been felled, so the squirrel must have darted along the ground, then up the superstructure. It took only a couple of nibbles of the razor sharp teeth, then it darted away again dripping hydraulic fluid.

"Bugger me!" I said, not realizing then that the squirrel had done exactly that.

Over the next three days, the forwarder shifted no more timber. I had men surrounding it with shotguns, but squirrels always got through, pierced the hoses, then fled, not always escaping with their lives. On one occasion a cutter shot a squirrel as it was actually biting a hose, and that destroyed five adjacent hoses as well. All the while, Amos sat and watched. I refused to acknowledge, even to myself, that he had anything

at all to do with the stupid dilemma.

I cleaned the local distributor out of hoses, and while we were waiting for him to restock, I tried to devise other ways of protecting the forwarder. Although I invented many ingenious covers for the vulnerable pipes, in practice they didn't work. It became very worrying.

On the sixth morning, the forwarder was sitting on its wheel rims. Holes surrounded by squirrel-sized nibbles of rubber stared at me with their black eyes. Those tires were nearly a thousand pounds each, and I began to feel very sick.

"I told you, young man," Amos said, appearing at my elbow.

He was either very brave or very stupid. I've never struck anyone in anger in my life, but I came very near to it then. I still didn't accept that the squirrels were motivated by him, they *couldn't* be, but he certainly seemed at the core of my problems.

"If you give me a can of paint," said Amos, "I'll start marking the stems to leave in. I think the squirrels will let you

carry on then."

I gave him a withering look, went to the car phone, and ordered four new tires.

I was over twenty thousand pounds out of pocket when I gave up with the forwarder and brought in the horses. Horses have been dragging timber out of forests for hundreds of years, and while they aren't as efficient as machines, they are far more dependable. I'd redone my sums, and I was going to be about fifty thousand pounds adrift of my original figures, but I could still turn a profit. To my delight, Amos was crestfallen when the first horses arrived.

"I'd much rather you didn't use them," he said quietly.

"Why? Does God draw the line at nobbling horses?"

"No," Amos hesitated. "But he doesn't *like* hurting them. It's not just the horses, some of the men could be injured. I'd much rather you didn't use horses."

I ignored him. He looked sad about it, and that cheered me. Instead, I helped to fix the drag lines to the horses, checked the tackle, and gave the men their instructions. I didn't know what squirrels could do to horses, but there were plenty of men with shotguns just in case.

In the event, it wasn't squirrels. It was bees. Worse, Amos' prophecy proved tragically correct and one of my men was rushed away in an ambulance with a suspected fractured skull after a spooked and badly stung horse had kicked him.

Afterwards, my foreman told me the men were quitting. "Witchcraft," he said. "I hope you understand."

Like all good businessmen, I knew when to cut my losses.

I still owned a thousand acre forest I couldn't fell, but it was only one of many, and I managed to absorb the loss. It hurt, of course, and for a while my accountant thought I might go bust, but rising timber prices saved me.

**...the squirrel must have darted along the ground, then up the superstructure. It took only a couple of nibbles of the razor sharp teeth, then it darted away again dripping hydraulic fluid.**

After a few years, I began to think about it, and although old Amos' plans of selectively thinning the existing broadleaves was nothing like as profitable as planting conifers, it could provide a return on investment. It would set me back another fifty thousand to actually do it, but I had the cash to spare now, so why not? It was better than leaving a forest of worthless coppice.

So I loaded the Land Rover with cans of paint, and drove right into the forest with it, right up to the cottage itself.

Amos called for me to come in when I knocked, but his voice was frail and wavery. He was sitting in his battered arm chair, a squirrel on his shoulder, and he looked a hundred years old.

"Hello, son," he smiled toothlessly. "Brought me some paint, have you?"

"How did you know?" I asked, remembering how his precise guessing had puzzled me in the past.

He smiled some more, and said nothing.

"Yes, I've brought paint," I said wearily. "Mark the best stems, and I'll cut every thing else out. You've won, old man."

"No, *God's* won," he corrected.

"As you like."

"You won't regret it," he said, suddenly gripping my hand warmly. "If your son comes back in sixty years, and fells one tree in five, then his children come back every forty years and do the same, the forest can regenerate fast enough to keep going forever. It's the only way. Don't let the conifers in, son. Conifers are dark as death."

"It's a long term investment," I admitted. "But I'd still rather plant conifers."

"Look son," said Amos cryptically, still gripping my hand. "I'm dying. If you wait a few more weeks, I'll be gone. If you still want to clear fell and plant your dark trees, then I won't be able to stop you."

"I thought you said it was God!"

"It is. Working through me. When I die, you'll have freedom of choice, and I think you'll find God still wins."

I hadn't understood what he meant, but I left the paint and drove away. I went back three weeks later to see if he had in fact marked any trees, but I couldn't see any.

When I knocked on the door, it creaked open, and I saw him sitting dead in his chair. Long dead. The smell was not good, so I stood back, then sat against a tree, gazing at his corpse through the open door.

After a while I went quickly into the cottage for one of the tins of paint. I found myself whistling as I marked trees, and I felt a strange elation.

God *had* won, I realized. And I was glad.

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## 2AM READER POLL:

We'd like to know your favorite stories in this issue. Please list below your 3 top favorites; to be received no later than March 15th, 1992. Results will be listed in the next issue of 2AM.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

No need to cut this page. Just write your list on a postcard and mail to Gretta M. Anderson, c/o READER POLL, 2AM Magazine, Box 6754, Rockford, IL 61125-1754.

# UNDYING GLAMOR (cont'd from page 30)

held it out to me.

"You want it, Jordan, I know you do. I can see it in your eyes. You can't tell me you don't want it."

The sight of it stopped me. Blood—dark, red, rich. Alive. Pulsing with every beat of his heart. Oh yes, I wanted it, he could never know how much I wanted it. I was trembling, he was trembling. The glamor had us both trapped, and I couldn't resist it any longer. With a sudden desperate moan I grabbed hold of his hand, pulled it to my mouth, sucking hard, and the taste of the blood, salt and iron....

A spasm hit my gut, and I retched, spraying Merrick's face with blood and spit. I shoved him away, spewing onto the floor, thinking the spasms were going to turn me inside out.

Merrick was on his knees, yelling, "Hey! Goddamit, what's the matter with you?"

I think that's what did it, the way he was screaming at me. What made me crack. If he'd only just left me *alone*....

The knife was still there on the floor. I picked it up. His eyes went scared, he started to babble, "Hey, Jordan, hey, I mean, come on! Look, let's just forget the whole thing! OK? Come on, what's the matter, no, *don't!*"

He could have fought back, he was stronger than I was, but no one had ever tried to kill him before. He couldn't take it seriously, not until it was too late. He did try to grab the knife away from me, but when I slashed him across the palm he pulled away and tried to run. I put the knife into his back. It was a small blade, only about six inches. I had to cut him again and again. He was hard to kill.

There was a lot of blood, all over the floor, splattered on the cabinets, on the walls, the refrigerator. On me. I was retching all the time I was killing him, and after, with the curdled blood all over his body, there on the floor. The worst mess I'd ever seen.

I managed to get out of town before they found him. There in my apartment, oh yeah, with all that blood. I could imagine when the probation guy showed up, used his key to open the door. I knew what they'd think.

Or maybe not. See, I didn't know. Maybe they might even believe me. Juralski could tell them, how it was with me. He might even say it wasn't my fault. I even thought a couple times of turning myself in. But what good would it have done? Merrick would be just as dead, wouldn't he? And I didn't think I'd get a second chance, no matter what. This time they'd lock me away for good.

So I got out of town. I kept moving around, I went outside in the daytime, I even got a job—one of the kind they don't ask for your Social Security card. I wasn't getting any more Disability checks. And I had to eat—something.

But it wasn't any good. See, they cured me, they took it all away—the hunger, the fangs, all of it but the glamor. The glamor never died. And Merrick wasn't the only one—the hollow ones, the empty ones, they're out there now, waiting for me. Wherever I go, they know where I am. They won't leave me alone. I can feel their eyes, following me all the time. All

those hollow souls.

I try to tell them I'm not what they think, I can't give them what they want, but they don't believe me. They follow me. They cut themselves.

This one...this one, I swear, I never touched her. She came here, she begged me for it. I tried to get rid of her, I locked the door, but she put her hand through the window—you can see how the glass is broken, blood all over it, reaching for me through the window, blood running all down her arms.

I don't care anymore what you do to me. Lock me up, anything. I've just got to get away from them.

They keep *following* me!

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Future issues will include Blythe Ayne, Michael R. Collings, James S. Dorr, Lee Dresselhaus, Casey Foster, Anne Goring, Bentley Little, Alix Munro, William Rasmussen, William Schoell, Josepha Sherman, Diane Sloan, James K. Van Lydegraf and others. Subscribe today!



# PAYMENT

by Kristine Kathryn Rusch  
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Every night you see the opossum cross the alley. Its ghost-white face catches the glare of your headlights, and its rat-like body scuttles away from your tires. You would hit it if you could. You blame it for the overturned garbage cans, the paw marks littering your shiny blue car. You ignore the other evidence, the alley cats yowling beneath your window at midnight, the clanging of cans near dawn. All you want to do is run down that opossum, to smash it beneath your car's weight, to destroy its dark, hollow eyes.

The eyes that remind you of your infant daughter's.

By day, you are a monster, a man in a cheap three-piece suit who sits in a cubicle in a finance company and grants loans to people who cannot afford to pay them. You enjoy calling delinquent clients, threatening them, harassing them, taking away things that they have worked their whole life for because they cannot regularly make \$100 payments at 27% interest. By night, though, you are a mild-mannered everyman, a widower, who lives on a tree-lined street with his baby daughter, and his six-year-old housecat. You mow the lawn, you watch football, you spend too much on childcare, and you trade gossip with the neighbors.

You know they talk about you: *Poor man. His wife died in childbirth—in this day and age!—and now he has to raise that pretty little girl by himself.* They bring you breads, muffins, cakes, leftovers. The elderly women peek into your house to see how neat you keep it.

You keep it very neat. You hate dirt. Even in those last few days, those days before you rushed her to the hospital, blood dripping between her legs, your wife kept the house spotless. From bed, where the doctor ordered she remain, she willed away each speck of dust, each strand of cat hair. She made sure everything was clean before you came home because she knew how much dirt bothered you, how you hated so much as one

unwashed dish sitting beside the sink. And then she died and left the cleaning to you. Left the child to you.

At dusk, before you take off your suit, you go into your daughter's room and watch her stare at the mobile above her crib. Your wife decorated the room in pale yellows and greens, not wanting the child to learn sex differences by color. This is the child that was going to save you, to make you quit your monster job and get a real job at a bank or with a savings and loan. You stare at your daughter's dark eyes and think of the opossum, of the garbage cans and the paw prints, and of the

destruction such eyes bring. And you wonder if you have to wear your suit to be a monster by night.

Somewhere you read that cats love the talcum smell of a newborn baby. They sit next to the baby, nuzzle it, sleep next to it, blocking its breath and stealing its soul. You leave the door open at night, hoping your cat will do the job for you. But your cat sleeps with you, purring, and lying across your feet. It has no interest in the baby, does not want to steal a murderer's soul.

So every day you go to work, and strive to become the best collector you can. You recover TVs, you recover stereos, you recover automobiles. You ignore the deadbeats' claims that if they had one more

week, one more paycheck, just as you ignored the doctor's softly spoken sentence: *she was too exhausted to give birth to the child. If you had let her stay in bed as I ordered....* Such voices echo in your dreams with the screams of the alley cats and the clang of garbage cans, forgotten with the first ray of sunlight and the dawn.

And every dusk you stand at your daughter's bedside, clutching a small pillow between both of your hands, wondering if you can threaten a being with opossum eyes. You want to recover her mother, but someone keeps making the payments. You can't even issue a past-due notice. You feel helpless, powerless as you have never felt at your job. You crush the pillow beneath your hands instead of crushing against the child's face. You wonder what will happen if she suffocates against the fabric. You discover that you are like the cat:

You don't want a murderer's soul.

**Somewhere you  
read that cats love  
the talcum smell of  
a newborn baby.  
They sit next to the  
baby, nuzzle it,  
sleep next to it,  
blocking its breath  
and stealing its  
soul.**

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## REAL TIME™

From Gilbert Pascual, Phoenix, AZ: Thank you for sending the writer's guidelines and sample copy of *2AM* so promptly. I must say that you publish a great magazine, I totally enjoyed it. In fact, I was surprised at just how good issue #17 was, and I'm looking forward to the next issue. In fact, I'm putting my money where my mouth is, enclosed is a check for a four issue subscription.

All the stories, poems and features were very good. If I had to pick three stories as best of the issue, (a very difficult choice) I would have to pick the stories by, T. C. Guy as first, Wayne Allen Sallee second and the John Coyne story in third place....

From Anthony M. Gallegos, New York, NY: I picked up a copy of the Spring 1991 *2AM* and read through it to get an idea of the sort of fiction you look for. I discovered that I've been missing a lot of great horror. The fiction pieces were terrific, especially "De Natura Vana Perceptionis," "Even Steven," and "Haggardly Beth and the Black Hour." The John Coyne interview was very interesting as well... Great magazine!

From Robert Morrish, Los Gatos, CA: The following stories from *2AM* were selected for Volume 11's (of *Quick Chills*) Honorable Mention List: Kevin Anderson's "Family Portrait," Donald Burleson's "Snow Cancellations," John Coyne's "Burn This Flag," S. K. Epperson's "Snake Man," C. S. Fuqua's "Old Lady Campbell, She Is Dead," Patrick McLeod's "The Confessional," Jeffrey Osier's "The Face On The Stairs," Brian Skinner's "De Natura Vana Perceptionis," and Chris Walter's "The Cold Deep." I'm not positive about this, but offhand I'd say that *2AM* had more stories on our Honorable Mention List than any other publication. No *2AM* stories were picked for inclusion in the book, but the Skinner tale was pretty much the final one to be cut.

From Graham Watkins, Durham, NC: I have been meaning to write to you for some time, if for no other reason than to thank you for the review of my novel *DARK WINDS* that appeared in your magazine a couple of years

ago, but I misplaced your address and only recently came across it again. I have enclosed, in case you didn't get one already, a flyer for my latest, *THE FIRE WITHIN*. Thanks for your help, and—belatedly—for the review.

From Charles deLint, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Thanks for another fine issue of *2AM*. I was particularly intrigued with Anne Bishop's "The Weapon" this time around—the transition from period piece to sf was handled very well. The reprint of Schweitzer's story was fun to see again as well.

Mind you, my favorite part of the magazine is still Relling's column. His look at the remaking of classic films was spot on the money.

I found myself shaking my head in disagreement over Williamson's critique of Ira Levin's *SLIVER*—I thought the moral questions Levin raised re: spying on other people to be fascinating—but then, if we all had the same taste what a boring world it would be.

From Mark Rainey, Greensboro, NC: I appreciate the nice remarks about *Deathrealm* in the review column and "2 to 2" section. Unfortunately, our release schedules have been such that it's been almost impossible to get a timely review in for *2AM*, and this is true again—#16 is at press and was finished up just in time to miss your latest issue.

I haven't read all the fiction yet, but I did read all the non-fiction. Was especially keen on Jerry W.'s column this time. And Bill Relling's was good. I noticed a sparsity of art this time, but the issue is still quite attractive....

From Robert Baldwin, LaCanada, CA: "Cybele and Attis," the opener in #18, was gripping in more ways than one. It pulled me in and left a lasting scar, just like the story itself. Thanks to Ken Wisman for taking us to the altar and exposing us to the mandibles of love.

Jeanette Hopper's "Dinner at Sophie's Place" came very much alive with some very interesting, credible characters, besides, the cool one, who lingered in the breeze somewhere near.

Nice collection of stories, Gretta.

From Tim Walters, Muskogee, OK: I found William Relling's eclectic essay (*2AM*#18) to be his finest piece to date. The last decade of right wing political administrations has certainly aided and abetted the censors of the world. Reagan and Bush have gradually packed the Supreme Court with judges who are not overly concerned with protecting the First Amendment. Attempts to restrict free speech and individual expression have flourished. We have seen books banned from libraries, and a Meese Commission. We have seen the most notorious opponent to all who cherish free speech, Jesse Helms. The saddest fact is that Bush will probably be reelected in '92.

I was thrilled to see an interview with Tulsa author Ron Dee. His views on dark fantasy were rather intriguing. Mr. Dee is just one of several sf/f/h writers who reside here in Oklahoma. R. A. Lafferty, C. J. Cherryh, John Wooley, Ron Wolfe, Mercedes Lackey, Mike McCuay, K. D. Wentworth, and Warren Brown each call Oklahoma their home.

From Tom Lightfoote, Penn Yan, NY: ...While I have your ear, let me make a few comments as a subscriber. The two issues I have received have been superb. The stories have been excellent, and the "Dark Corner" and "Small Press Reviews" have been interesting and informative. The one thing I would change, had I the power, would be to request William Relling Jr. change the focus of "Adventures in the Scream Trade." Failing that, I would abolish the column altogether. As it stands, the column should be renamed "Rants from the Left Wing." Come on, isn't the knee jerk anti-Nixon routine a bit passé? Besides that, what place does it have in *2AM*? When I want political commentary I tune in the roundtable discussion on *This Week* with David Brinkley. When I want a good horror or fantasy story I pick up *2AM*. If Relling's tirades are the admission price, I'll pay. But the cost is one I would rather not bear.

# Adventures in the Scream Trade

by William Relling Jr.  
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I have to tell you, honest to God, if it weren't for Harlan Ellison I probably would not be a writer.

Okay. It's possible that some of you are out there saying to yourselves, "Great. There's another reason to despise Harlan, the son of a bitch. He gave us this asshole Bill Relling. Swell."

Like those of you who already don't think much of Harlan need another reason, eh?

That's one of the curious things about him. I've heard from more than one person that you either love him or you hate him. I can, in fact, name a handful of my own acquaintances—people who also happen to be acquainted with Harlan—whom I could readily place in one camp or the other. The reason why that's curious—to me anyway—is that I don't really fall into either camp. I've met Harlan maybe a half dozen times: once at his home, where both he and his wife Susan (who is a very sweet and lovely human being) proceeded to whip my ass at pool, another couple of times at book signings; once at a broadcasting of *Hour 25* that he hosted; once at a World Fantasy Convention; most recently at the HWA bash in Redondo Beach last June. I've spoken to him—briefly—on the phone another two or three times. Whenever I've encountered him he's seemed to react a bit oddly to me, as if he didn't know which category to put me into. Perhaps it's because I've invariably greeted him with something like, "Hi, Harlan. How's it going?" I neither gush obsequiously nor spew invective—and every stranger who comes up to him seems to do pretty much one or the other—so he isn't quite sure what to make of me. What can I say? I don't really know him well enough to've formed an opinion whether I like or dislike him as a person, so why should I be anything but cordial? Heck, I'm a polite guy.

My more important association with Harlan is, of course, as a reader of his work, which I've been since around, oh, 1971. The first story of his that I encountered was "A Boy and His Dog," in one of those Terry Carr/Donald Wolheim YEAR'S BEST SF collections. Needless to say, I was as blown away by the story as the rest of you were the first time you read it. Shortly after my meeting Vic and Blood, I picked up a copy of *ELLISON WONDERLAND*. I devoured the book in one sitting. (After I'd read it, ha-ha!) It was then that Harlan became my Favorite Writer in the World.

He stayed my Favorite Writer for several years, all through high school and college. He isn't any more, having since been passed up by guys like Faulkner and Vonnegut and John D. MacDonald and Raymond Chandler. Which is not to say that many of the stories of his I've read since becoming an "adult" aren't wonderful and brilliant; "Jeffy is Five" and "All the Birds Come Home to Roost," just to name two, come to mind with little effort. Besides, I'm sure Harlan would agree with me that, hey, they can't all be gems. But I digress.

From *ELLISON WONDERLAND* I went to

*DANGEROUS VISIONS*. (I'll always be grateful to Harlan for introducing me to Silverberg and Spinrad and Ballard and Leiber and Dick; Robert Bloch I already knew about.) By then I was aware that Harlan had written one of my favorite *Star Trek* episodes and two of my favorite *Outer Limits* episodes; I didn't find out about *Burke's Law* till later, but that'd been a show I'd liked a lot, too, when I was a kid. *Alone Against Tomorrow* floored me. When Ace came out with their Harlan Ellison uniform editions in 1975, starting with *THE GLASS TEAT*, I was in Hog Heaven. For awhile, anyway, till the plug got pulled on that particular series.

It was around then, in the mid-1970s, shortly after my graduation from college, that I became somewhat less taken with Harlan's work. I'm speaking primarily about his fiction. By then I'd become a discriminating enough reader to recognize that much of it was—and still is—so pyrotechnically-oriented that its flaws were often masked. Pyrotechnics are way more dazzling to a sixteen year old than they are to someone in his or her 20s. Or, now, to somebody just a couple of years shy of 40.

But even though Harlan isn't my Very Favorite Writer in the World, he's still up there. As I say, it isn't so much for his fiction any more as for what I suppose might be called his "personal journalism." I haven't read all the stories in *SHATTERDAY* or *STALKING THE NIGHTMARE* or even *ANGRY CANDY*; it's possible that I never will. (I own copies of the books, so at least Harlan got some royalty money from me.) But you know what I have read all of? *AN EDGE IN MY VOICE*. *SLEEPLESS NIGHTS IN THE PROCURSTANE BED*. *HARLAN ELLISON'S WATCHING*. *THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK*. I've read 'em all, and re-read 'em all. It's that stuff, his non-fiction, which still knocks me out, nowadays as ever.

I don't think it's too hard to guess why that's the case. First of all, there's his politics, which, if you've read, say, *AN EDGE IN MY VOICE* you know lie somewhat, ahem, left of center. He and I are kindred spirits in that regard, as regular readers of "Scream Trade" have no doubt, ahem, noticed.

Second, there's his forthrightness. It would be an understatement to suggest that there is nothing coy about Harlan, no subtlety; as the saying goes, he's as subtle as a flying mallet. He lays it all out in front of you: *Here it is, take it or leave it*. He holds nothing back, bares all. Occasionally it can be painful to absorb; he's loud, he's hyperbolic, he's judgmental, he's ego-maniacal, often he's intransigent, sometimes he's flat out wrong. But he's always telling the truth about how he feels. He can be brutal at times, God knows. But honest, always honest.

Third, he is one of a very few artists I can think of whose work and whose self are inseparable. He's tried to deny this on occasion, among other places in the intros to the various stories in *SHATTERDAY* and in his essay

"You Don't Know Me, I Don't Know You." It's my suspicion that when he assumes that particular posture it's because somebody has been giving him shit about some seemingly self-promotional stunt or other; writing stories in the windows of bookstores; chivvying an audience at a lecture gig; castigating his fellow members of the WGA for bad behavior; making a melodramatic entrance to pick up a World Fantasy Award; whatever. Most of the time I don't see anything necessarily wrong with that, however many times I might feel chagrined when I hear of another "Harlan Ellison" anecdote or witness one in the making. In Harlan's case, the art and the artist are one. Again, you take it or you leave it. He is, in fact, the embodiment of something Irwin Shaw once said (in a quote that Harlan himself is fond of recalling): *"[A writer] is engaged in the long process of putting his whole life on paper. He is on a journey and he is reporting in."* *"This is where I think I am and this is what the place looks like today."*

Fourth, there's so much he's turned me on to over the years, however unknowingly. Any number of writers; those I mentioned above and others like Borges and Neruda and Nathanael West and Howard Browne and Robert Cormier and Dan Simmons. It's on account of Harlan that I know who Django Reinhardt is. He's acquainted me with both *THE FISH POLICE* and *THE ROCKETEER*. It's almost entirely his fault that I live in Los Angeles, because of the portrait of the city he painted in *THE GLASS TEAT* and *THE OTHER GLASS TEAT*. (I moved here one month before his essay "Face Down in Gloria Swanson's Swimming Pool" was published in *Los Angeles Magazine*. A bit of serendipity there, my reading that essay upon its publication. At a low time in my life, when I was seriously questioning whether I'd made an incredibly stupid move, packing up lock, stock, and you-know-what, leaving an entire life behind, here's Harlan reminding me why I did it, and why it's doubtful I'd ever want to live any place else.)

Fifth, there's "Adventures in the Scream Trade." If you can't hear a little of Harlan Ellison's voice echoing in these words of mine, you're not listening close enough.

So, you ask, why have I been telling you all this?

Because I've never told anybody before. Not my wife, nor any of my friends or fellow writers. Nobody. I was feeling like it was time to do that. There are a number of people whom I've admired, who've influenced me greatly, to whom I'll never be able to express my gratitude. John Lennon comes to mind. So does E. B. White.

Hey, Harlan. Thanks, man, for helping make me what I am. Thanks a lot. I mean it.



TWO SECONDS TO TWO

# An Interview With Ellen Datlow

by Rob Errera  
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As fiction editor of *Cmni Magazine* for the past ten years, Ellen Datlow has showcased some of the finest new authors of speculative fiction. Born in New York, Datlow—now 42—grew up in the Bronx and Yonkers. Datlow has been a resident of Manhattan since 1973.

After graduating from the State University of New York at Albany, she spent what she calls "the best year of my life" in Europe before landing her first publishing job with Little, Brown as a sales assistant. Datlow was an editorial assistant and assistant editor at various book publishers before starting to work freelance for *Cmni Magazine* in 1979. She has edited the OMNI BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION (vol. 1 through 7), BLOOD IS NOT ENOUGH, ALIEN SEX, THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR (vol. 1 through 4) and A WHISPER OF BLOOD.

The following interview with Ellen Datlow took place before a book signing at a Barnes and Noble Megastore in Paramus, NJ on October 28, 1991. She was carrying a set of custom made vampire teeth in her purse.

**2AM: Can you tell me what new works are out now and what will be forthcoming?**  
Datlow: Well, A WHISPER OF BLOOD is out now (William Morrow) and THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR was released in July (4th Annual Collection co-edited with Terri Windling, St. Martin's Press.)

An anthology called SNOW WHITE, BLOOD RED is in production but probably won't be released until 1993. It's a collection of fairy tales I edited with Terri Windling for William Morrow Publishers. It's an updating and retelling of actual fairy tales. The writers can do whatever they want with them but they have to start with an actual fairy tale.

**2AM: Is it for kids?**

Datlow: It's definitely not for kids—in fact it's for adults, that's the whole idea. There's some sex, a little violence. All the good stuff.

**2AM: Who are some of the authors in the anthology?**

Datlow: Let's see... Tanith Lee is in it. Gahan Wilson. Nancy Kress. Harvey Jacobs. Charles DeLint. Neil Gaiman. Katha Koja. Jane Yolen. It's a real combination of horror writers, science fiction writers and fantasy writers.

**2AM: Are these all original works?**

Datlow: Yes, they're all original stories. We have two "Rapunzel" stories that are very different from each other. And two "Little Red Riding Hood" stories. "Rapunzel" and "Little Red Riding Hood" are very popular.

**2AM: Anything else?**

Datlow: I'm working on an erotic horror anthol-

ogy called BLOOD AND ROSES. It has been commissioned by Deborah Beale at Random Century and will come out in England first. It's a massive anthology of erotic horror fiction, more than 150,000 words.

**2AM: How does it work when you want to put together an anthology? Do you contact the authors first? The publisher?**

Datlow: Well, BLOOD AND ROSES, the erotic horror anthology was an exception in that the publisher contacted me. Usually what I'll do is put together a one page proposal of what I want to do and why this anthology is different from others. Before I send the proposal out I'll go to different writers, explain the project and try to get verbal commitments from them. Then I'll give the package to my agent and see what kind of response I get.

**2AM: Do you think you'll do any more vampire anthologies?**

Datlow: I doubt it. I think I've had enough (laughs). Unless somebody offered me a lot of money.

**2AM: How did you get into this business?**

Datlow: Well, I was in book publishing for several years before I started working for *Cmni*. I kind of bounced around in mainstream hardcover book publishing for a number of years. A friend at Holt, Rinehart and Winston mentioned this magazine that was starting up called *Cmni*. Frank Kendig was the executive editor there so I talked to him about a job. I interviewed with him and I interviewed with Ben Bova who was the fiction editor. I started freelancing for Ben part time. A few months later they made Ben editor and they hired Bob Shekley as the new fiction editor. He didn't have a lot of experience working in an office or working as an editor so a vacuum kind of occurred and I was able to learn a lot about the business and make a niche there for myself. When Bob left about a year and a half later, they made me fiction editor. That's how I got to *Cmni*.

**2AM: How long ago was that?**

Datlow: I've been fiction editor since 1981.

**2AM: Do you like it?**

Datlow: Very much. It's the perfect job and the only one of its kind. I'm pretty much left alone to do what I want by the rest of the magazine. It's nice to have the autonomy and not have to answer too much to other people.

**2AM: Have you ever had any problems**

being a woman in this business?

Datlow: (laugh) No. Well... from an editor's point of view I have no problem with it. I cast a wide net when looking for writers and because of that I'm able to get a more interesting array of people, both men and women. Some anthologists only use their friends and because they're writers not editors, they have a limited scope of people they can get in touch with. I think that's why, as an editor, I'm able to get in touch with a greater variety of writers.

**2AM: But you've never encountered any trouble advancing in the industry because you're a woman?**

Datlow: No, I don't think it has anything to do with my being a woman. I think in mainstream book publishing I had a lot of trouble because I wasn't an Ivy Leaguer. If you weren't from an Ivy League college there was a very snobbish attitude in the book publishing industry.

**2AM: When did you develop your interest in horror and science fiction?**

Datlow: When I was a kid I loved fairy tales. Especially the sad ones. I've liked Poe ever since I was a kid. I read more horror than science fiction when I was growing up. I think it came from reading fairy tales. I read some Robert Heinlein.

**2AM: Do you have any personal favorites?**

Datlow: Lewis Carroll. I love "Alice in Wonderland." I think Harlan Ellison, J.G. Ballard and Ray Bradbury influenced me more than anyone else when I was a teenager. I read a lot of short stories in high school. I always read the "Year's Best's".

**2AM: What's best so far this year?**

Datlow: There's some really good short fiction being published. I thought some of the stories in HOTTER BLOOD (Pocket Books—an original anthology of erotic horror fiction) were quite good, better than the first collection (HOT BLOOD).

What I'm finding that's interesting is a lot of graphic novelists are writing excellent fiction. Grant Morrison has one of the best stories in HOTTER BLOOD.

I'd have to say there have been more anthologies out this year than there have been for the last five years. Suddenly everything that has been commissioned in the last five years is coming out. Some of them are terrible and some of them are pretty good. It's a real mix.

COLD SHOCKS is good (Avon Books). OBSESSIONS (Dark Harvest) was interesting.

I'm a little behind with my novel reading. The best thing I've read this year is a prison novel called STONE CITY by Mitchell Smith.

Photo: J. K. Potter

It's not really horror but it's harrowing. I think people who like horror would like it.

I read *AMERICAN PSYCHO* (by Bret Easton Ellis), of course. I thought it was bad horror. Paul Theroux wrote a book called *CHICAGO LOOP* that was much better. That book, and *FRISK* by Dennis Cooper, is what *AMERICAN PSYCHO* should have been.

**2AM:** In your summation of 1990 *IN THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR #4*, you mentioned a preference for psychological horror. Do you still feel that way?

**Datlow:** On the whole I think it's better written. I'm finding too few supernatural novels go far enough or follow through. They just get fuzzy and stupid. It's sloppiness basically. Supernatural novels are harder to write. Just like it's harder to write good science fiction than it is to write good fantasy, it's also harder to write good supernatural horror than it is to write good psychological horror. Most people know it's not real and writers really have to convince a reader. I don't think enough people are good at that.

**2AM:** Do you have any specific definitions for science fiction, fantasy and horror?

**Datlow:** Oh no, they all blend together for me.

**2AM:** Do you have any preference among the three?

**Datlow:** I really don't like much fantasy... well, that's not really true—most of what I publish in *Omn* these days is fantasy because there's so little science fiction being written. Every editor I know complains because nobody is writing honest to goodness science fiction. It's either science fantasy or out and out fantasy.

Actually I like reading it all. I like reading science fiction short stories and I like reading horror short stories and novels. As far as fantasy, I like reading the off-beat. As it turns out, a lot of what I read has fantasy elements in it though it wouldn't exactly be considered fantasy.

**2AM:** There's a fine line in between.

**Datlow:** The problem with fantasy is that it sometimes suffers from the "elfy-welfies." I don't like "elfy-welfies." I'd say most of what I like would be considered fiction with a really dark edge to it, maybe with a touch of psychological horror. I only like mainstream if there's something weird going on in it.

**2AM:** Do you think there's a drought in the science fiction field right now?

**Datlow:** I think everybody's waiting for the next thing, whatever that's going to be. After cyberpunk I don't know what's going to happen.

**2AM:** What do you think of cyberpunk?

**Datlow:** I like certain writers. I think William Gibson is one of a kind.

**2AM:** Are you a fan of hard science fiction?

**Datlow:** I'm a fan of good hard science fiction. I find that most people who write good hard science aren't very good at characterization and I demand both. I demand a good plot, interesting characters, and hard science. But

it's too rare that you get all that.

**2AM:** Do you find fiction overseas any better?

**Datlow:** I think the British scene is getting very interesting. There are some excellent new writers; Greg Egan, Nicola Griffith, Storm Constantine, Nicholas Royle. Otherwise Europeans are about 20 years behind in their fiction writing as far as I'm concerned.

**2AM:** What do you think of splatterpunk horror?

**Datlow:** It's irrelevant. Good horror uses violence if it needs it. To just get "in your face" all the time makes it boring. It's all one tone. Horror has to creep up, build in some way. I have nothing against using violence in horror fiction but it has to be used well.

**2AM:** The same for sex?

**Datlow:** I'm not wild about gratuitous sex. If sexuality is an integral part of the story, that's fine. A lot of stuff is just bad writing. People are ignorant and don't know how to write women characters. They have no idea how men and women relate to each other.

**2AM:** In your vampire anthologies and *ALIEN SEX* there is that constant element of sexuality. Do you think that's an important vehicle for writers to use?

**Datlow:** Yes, I think you can write a lot of interesting plots around the theme. I don't think enough has been done about sexuality and gender, especially in science fiction. *ALIEN SEX* deals more with gender than sexuality. I think it's time that science fiction grew up. Some people have done wonderful things with it: James Tiptree Jr., Samuel Delany. But mostly people think science fiction is for kids. It would be nice to think it doesn't have to be anymore.

**2AM:** As far as structure—short story, novella, novel, verse—do you find any one better suited for the genre than others?

**Datlow:** Well, in science fiction I think the short story or novella is where innovation comes from and I think that's where the new writers come from. That's where you'll see people experimenting. You can't afford to experiment in a novel unless you're well established and even then if the novel fails you could harm your career. Short stories are the place for creative science fiction.

Horror is different. There are no professional horror magazines. The major outlet is theme anthologies, which are harder to experiment in than magazines. I try to keep my anthologies open to creativity.

**2AM:** What do you look for in a short story?

**Datlow:** That depends on what market I'm looking to buy for. If I'm looking for a horror story I want it to disturb me in some way. If I'm looking for a fantasy story I want to be involved, I want to care about the characters, I want to see some kind of magic. Not necessarily "wizard" magic, but some type of transcendental magic. In science fiction I look for an interesting use of technology or an interesting aspect of the future. First and foremost I look

for good stories. I'm a proponent of good storytelling.

**2AM:** Do you write any fiction yourself?

**Datlow:** No. Not at all. I have no desire or interest to. I'd rather read other people's work.

**2AM:** Well you certainly have an eye for it. Do you feel you've discovered anyone particularly significant?

**Datlow:** No, I don't like to take credit like that. Some people feel that I've discovered them but I don't think that's fair. William Gibson kind of points to me for giving him a big break. I think I've showcased a few good writers, got their stuff out to a larger audience. *Omn* was the first American magazine to publish a Clive Barker story.

**2AM:** What advice would you give to young authors?

**Datlow:** Be persistent. Don't quit your day job. Check markets, make sure the market you're sending stuff to is interested in what you're trying to sell them. Do research.

**2AM:** Do you read any non-fiction?

**Datlow:** Not much but once in a while. It really has to impress me. I'm planning to read a bunch of Colin Wilson's "True Crime" stuff for *YEAR'S BEST*. Last year I read *UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD* which was a history of execution in America. That was fascinating.

**2AM:** What do you think the role of an editor should be?

**Datlow:** Well there are different roles depending on the type of editing you're doing and who you work for. I think my role is to get the writer to create the best work he or she can and to bring out what they're trying to say in the best way possible.

**2AM:** Are you tough on writers?

**Datlow:** Sometimes. It depends on the writer. I'm tougher on people I'm friends with. I'm tough on people I think can take it.

**2AM:** Have you ever turned down a story you later wished you hadn't?

**Datlow:** Yeah, once in a while. Sometimes I've turned stories down that I've liked but I still don't regret turning down. "All My Darling Daughters" by Connie Willis was something I turned down for *Omn*, but I picked up for *ALIEN SEX*.

**2AM:** Is the fiction you buy for *Omn* mostly science fiction?

**Datlow:** I try to buy science fiction, although there's so little I like out there that I'm mostly buying just weird fiction right now. Kind of science fantasy.

**2AM:** What do you see the trends going towards?

**Datlow:** Fewer people are writing science fiction. There seems to be a lull in the field right now. In the horror field a lot of publishers are cutting back but that's for good reason—there's a glut of bad horror. Right now the

(Continued on page 50)



## News and views of small press publications, organizations and people by Irwin Chapman

The transformation at *Cemetery Dance* has been truly amazing (especially occurring in such a short time: less than two years), and I want you to be aware how special this magazine really is. Not only does *Cemetery Dance* now have four-color covers and national distribution, but the quality of the contents has increased dramatically since CD's humble beginnings. The Fall 91 issue is as professional as anything you've ever seen (looks more professional than Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone* Magazine during TZ's heyday and has twice the amount of features that TZ offered). With 120 interior pages and only a handful of ads, CD has plenty of space for quality fiction and non-fiction. Let me stress the word *quality* here, folks. The stories are some of the finest I've read this year (and I read almost everything I can get my hands on). "Placebo" by Andrew Vachss is a powerful short-story that reminds me more than a little of Ray Bradbury's "The Troll" in *THE BRADBURY CHRONICLES*—both Bradbury and Vachss poo-poo modern psychiatry in favor of childhood fantasy. "Plainclothes" by Steve Rasnic Tem is a well-told tale about a beat cop who changes more than his uniform when he becomes a plainclothesman. "Almost Never" by Edward Lee is the tautest tale I've read in a long time. Rocco comes to life as a fully-three dimensional character, and Katie is so splendidly drawn that you can't help but fear for her safety (fear for her innocence, actually; and when she loses that beautiful innocence you don't know whether to cry your heart out or—when she takes her revenge—cheer). My favorite tale of the issue, though, (it's hard to choose among these four, but Stephen Spruiell's "YSEX" is pure dynamite) is a future-fantasy (call it sf, if you prefer) that's also a superb suspense story with a female cop, a crazed serial killer, a nasty psychiatrist (yes, another story about a shrink), and an android sex-toy that lets sexual deviants carry out perverted sexual fantasies on a life-like surrogate without hurting human beings. All four of these exceptional stories belong in hand-bound anthologies where they'll receive the widest-possible exposure, not in a small press (limited-circulation) horror zine. I hope all four are picked up by one or more "Year's Best" anthologies for 1991 (Karl, Ellen, Steve and Ramsey: please take a hint and grab these tales).

Another powerful tale—doubly so because it's the author's first published story—is the haunting "Where the Sky Never Cries" by G. Kyle White. Though no psychiatrist is visible in the actual story (a psychiatric nurse, maybe, and an equally-nasty orderly), you can

be sure there's a demented shrink hiding somewhere in the wings. Kudos, Kyle, on a superb first story. I look forward to reading your 2nd published story (whenver and wherever it sees print).

Ramsey Campbell makes two appearances in this issue of *Cemetery Dance*—as the subject of an in-depth interview conducted by T. Liam McDonald and as the author of an early Campbell tale, "Wrapped Up", published here for the first time; there's also an excerpt from F. Paul Wilson's new novel from *Dark Harvest*, SIBS; and the rest of the issue is made up of marvelous non-fiction pieces by Harlan Ellison, Charles L. Grant, Ed Gorman, Matthew J. Costello, Thomas F. Monteleone (his M.A.F.I.A. column transferred here from *Mystery Scene*), Bob Morris (an interview with Harlan Ellison), Douglas E. Winter, Joe R. Lansdale & David Webb, Edward Bryant, Paul Sammon, William F. Nolan (a continuation of the splatterpunk vs Life-Affirming Horror controversy Nolan began in *Horrorstruck* columns several years ago), A. R. Morlan, Bob Morris (again in an interview with Mark Ziesing), Tyson Blue, Lori Perkins, and various book reviewers who seem to know their stuff.

All in all, the Fall 91 issue of *Cemetery Dance* is a real treasure. Single issues are cover priced at \$4.00, but a one-year (4 issue) subscription is a steal at \$15.00. Order from Richard Chizmar, CD Publications, Box 858, Edgewood, MD 21040.

*Weirdbook 26* features a wonderful fantasy story by Darrell Schweitzer, "The Stolen Heart", where the hero's quest is to recover the heart of Kodos Vion, allegedly stolen by Black Veoada, the Night Hag. The superior quality of writing in stories by Schweitzer, Brian Lumley, Kevin J. Anderson, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Joe R. Lansdale and Ardath Mayhar (a collaboration by himself and herself entitled "The Panther Strikes"), Basil Wells, Diane Mapes, Brian McNaughton, Lee Barwood, Olga Cabral, and Jack Wodhams makes the 68-page *Weirdbook 26* a must read. There's superb poetry by Joseph Payne Brennan, Steve Eng, Steve Rasnic Tem, Bernadette Lynn Bosky, and half a dozen others, plus linear illos interspersed throughout. Though W. Paul Ganley is just starting to use a laser printer to output typeset quality pages and the production quality of *Weirdbook* looks traditional small press, the quality of the fiction and poetry is fully professional. Single copies are \$6.00 + \$1.15 postage and handling; subscriptions: 7 issues for \$25 (\$30 outside U.S.); order from W. Paul Ganley, Publisher; Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226-0149.

GUIGNOIR AND OTHER FURIES edited

by George Hatch and published by Horror's Head Press (Box 5175, Long Island City, NY 11105) is "the old *Nectulpa* in a completely anthological format with its own theme and title." What that means, folks, is *Nectulpa* is now an annual anthology series with a different title each year and none of the extra features one demands of a magazine—like reviews and interviews. Illustrated throughout by a single artist (this year it's the wonderfully capable Peter H. Gilmore, Art Director & Editorial Associate of *Grue*), GUIGNOIR looks and feels like a professionally edited anthology. Besides the obligatory introduction by the editor, there's fine fiction by Nancy Holder, Tia Travis, Norman Partridge, Valery Gallo, Mike Hurley ("Floater at Hag's Head", a decent tale with few real surprises but a satisfying feel and a unique format), Scott H. Urban, Lucy Taylor, Kevin J. Anderson, William J. Laughlin, Graham Watkins, Brian McCrady, Gerard Houamer, and Brian E. Drake. 144 pages, trade paperback format, \$6.95 plus \$1.05 postage & handling; make checks payable to George Hatch.

After a brief hiatus, *Grue* is back with issue #13 (Fall 91). 100 pages (96 interior, a front cover by Rick Lieder and a photo of Wayne Allen Sallee, disguised as a masked gunman, on the back cover) of dynamite fiction, poetry (*Grue* has the best poetry in the small press), artwork, and photos in an anthology format like GUIGNOIR (perfect bound so it looks like a cross between a trade paperback and *Weird Tales*), this issue is jam-packed with all you could ask for in cutting-edge horror. These are *nasty* tales, folks. Real nasty. Not for anyone with a faint heart or weak stomach. \$4.50 (pc-stage paid) single copy, \$13.00 for 3-issue subscription. Order from Hell's Kitchen Productions, Inc., Box 370, Times Square Station, NY, NY 10108-0370.

We knew it was only a matter of time ("twenty-five years is a pretty good run for a shoestring operation like this, considering the economy for the last half of that period," says editor Gordon Linznor) before *Space & Time* published their final issue. With the added obligation of raising a child while building a career as a successful novelist and short story writer, Linznor simply doesn't have time to produce *Space & Time* on its legendary regular schedule anymore. He will, along with Jani Anderson, continue publishing *Space & Time* books when they have time and money to do so. Thanks, Gordon and Jani, for launching so many careers with early publication of works by writers who went on to become big names. Without you, we might have missed many of the stories that today are considered classics.

The next-to-last issue (#79, Winter 1991) of SPACE & TIME features excellent fantasy and science fiction stories by Anton J. Petterson, Kim Antieau, Richard Singer, and Phyllis Ann Karr (stories longer than you'll find in most small press zines), and poetry by John & Traci Salonia, D. M. Vosk, Tom Rentz, Elizabeth Kliger, Carol Cail, Janet P. Reedman, Roger L. Dutcher, and Scott E. Green & Bruce Boston, plus good artwork to illustrate the stories and cover, and a lettercol section. Single copies are \$5; 2-issue subs are \$9.50. Order from Space & Time, 138 W. 70th St (4B), NY, NY 10023-4432.

It's hard to think of PULPHOUSE as "small press," but the humble beginnings and still-limited distribution of the most-successful specialty publisher of this decade allow me to include Pulphouse Publishing offerings in this column (I wish they'd send me review copies, though; I can't afford to buy everything they're putting out these days). Let me mention just three items that small press readers will find especially interesting: THE BEST OF PULPHOUSE: THE HARDBACK MAGAZINE edited by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (St Martin's Press, Sep 91, ISBN 0-312-06564-7, 328 pages, \$22.95; hc); AUTHORS' CHOICE MONTHLY ISSUE 24: J. N. WILLIAMSON (Pulphouse Publishing, Sep 91, no ISBN, 107 pages, \$4.95; pb); and THE STEEL VALENTINE by Joe R. Lansdale (Pulphouse Short Story Paperbacks #11, ISBN 1-56146-511-9, 39 pages, \$1.95; small rack-sized paperback).

THE BEST OF PULPHOUSE is a commercially-published hardbound anthology containing 26 stories reprinted from THE HARDBACK MAGAZINE, plus a short foreword by Kate Wilhelm and a delightfully insightful introduction by Kris Rusch. My favorite story is "The Two-Headed Man" by Nancy A. Collins, a touching tale of loneliness, physical deformity, and true love happening in a way you'd never dream possible. Other fine tales include "While She Was Out" by Edward Bryant, "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick, "The Moral Viologist" by Greg Egan, "Jamaica Vu" by Geoffrey A. Landis, "The Third Sex" by Alan Brenner, "Bits and Pieces" by Lisa Tuttle, "Savage Beasts" by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, "Willie of the Jungle" by Steve Perry, "Honey-mouth" by Harry Turtledove, "On A Phantom Tide" by William F. Wu, "Illusions in Relief" by Kathe Koja, "Boat People" by Joyce Tison, "A Traveler at Passover" by Lisa Goldstein, "Offerings" by Susan Palwick, "Sendings" by Robert Frasier, "Why Pop-Pop Died" by Francis J. Matozzo, The Murderer Chooses Sterility" by Bradley Denton, "Public Places" by J. N. Williamson, "Clearance to Land" by Adam-Troy Castro, "Creationism: An Illustrated Lecture in Two Parts" by Jane Yolen, "She's a Young Thing and Cannot Leave Her Mother" by Harlan Ellison, "Chopped Liver" by George Alec Effinger, "Nobody's Perfect" by Thomas F. Montealeone, and "The Soft Whisper of Midnight Snow" by Charles de Lint.

AUTHORS' CHOICE MONTHLY is a series of single author story collections, one issue per month from a different writer, and available in trade paperback (\$4.95) or limited

cloth editions (\$25.00). Number 24 features 8 of J. N. Williamson's best stories, including "They Never Even See Me" (from *Elly Queen's Mystery Magazine*), "Helter Shelter" (from *Night Cry*), "Time to Murder" (from *EQMM*), "Public Places" (from *Pulphouse #1* and reprinted in THE BEST OF PULPHOUSE), "Stalemate" (from NEVER-MORE!), "Aspirations" (from *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*), "Uncoverup" (from *SPWAO Showcase #5*), and "Happy Hour" (from TZ). Jerry introduces each of these tales with personal anecdotes and dedicates each story to close friends by name. "Not Exactly by Accident," the volume's introduction, is a brief autobiographical sketch of one of America's favorite storytellers. Jerry wanted to call this collection "The Naked Flesh of Feeling"—but the only place you'll find that title mentioned is in the introduction.

"The Steel Valentine," reprinted from Lansdale's Ziesing collection BY BIZARRE HANDS, is a gut-tearing revenge tale that's filled with action, suspense, and deliciously good writing. Morley has Dennis by the short hairs when the story opens, and Morley challenges his wife's lover to reverse the roles by story end. Can Dennis, chained by the neck to a crazed Doberman that's recently ravaged Dennis's sweetheart (and Morley's unfaithful wife), survive the mad dog's next attack? It's not "can he" that matters, but "how will he." An exciting tale told by a master of suspense.

*Fantasy Tales*, the British equivalent of *Weird Tales*, is now available in the US from Carroll & Graf. Edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton, *Fantasy Tales 4* (Jan 92, ISBN 0-88184-735-6, 192 pages, \$3.95; tp) reminds me a lot of the late-lamented *Night Cry*. Indeed, the cover is a reversal (mirror image reprint) of J. K. Potter's cover illo for the Fall 86 issue of *Night Cry*, and the interior layout looks similar too. Good fiction (both new and reprint) from Ramsey Campbell, Thomas F. Montealeone, Thomas Ligotti, Kathryn Ptacek, Adrian Cole, Trevor Donohue and Paul Collins, Philip C. Heath, Gary Kilworth, and Samantha Lee; verse by Edward Dorton and Evelyn K. Martin; and non-fiction by Peter James and the editors. *Fantasy Tales* began as a small press magazine back in the 70s and has now become a must-read combination magazine/anthology that's published professionally in both Great Britain (Robinson) and the US (Carroll & Graf) simultaneously.

"Celestial Inventory" is an original novelette by Steve Rasnic Tem, published by Chris Drumm Books (Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226) as Drumm Booklet #36 (ISBN 0-936055-47-2, \$4.00). Tem, an award-winning short story writer who has appeared in most major anthologies and twice in the pages of 2AM, writes about an eccentric recluse who has the vision to make ordinary things extraordinary. *Weird* story, folks. Pray this guy doesn't live in the apartment next to you. If you happen to find some junk mail with the addressee's name inked out under your apartment door, begin to worry.

The *Silver Web* is the new incarnation of *The Sterling Web*, with Ann Kennedy flying solo at the editorial desk for issue number 7 (Fall/Winter 91). The production values are

excellent: superb reproduction of art and photos, computer typeset in Times Roman, full magazine size (8 1/2 x 11), saddle stapled. There's a reprint of an old Charles Beaumont tale, an introduction to Beaumont by Cliff Burns, competent stories by Don Hornbostel, Jeff VanderMeer, Joshua Waterman, Octavio Ramos, Jon Picciullo, Wade Berman, Mark McLaughlin, Sean Ponce, and David Sydney, poetry by Chad Hensley, Herb Kauderer, John Grey, Alan Clark & David Conover, David Lunde, and Michael Robbins, and book reviews by Dan Reac. What makes *The Web* special, though, is the two-page spread called "Spinnerets," which profiles each of the authors and includes photographs so you can see what your favorite author looks like. 64 interior pages, well-illustrated by Alan Clark, Bob Crouch, Janet DuPuy, Dan Engvall, Roger Gerberding, Allen Koszowski, Jeff Mason, Cynthia Runko, Donald W. Schank, Trevor Talbert, and Augie Wiedermann. Single copies are \$4.75 + \$1.00 p&h.

Time really flies when you're having fun. I must have flying loads of fun, because it seems like just yesterday I was reviewing the last killer frog anthology from Janet Fox and now I have in my hands the new *Killer Frog Dressed to Kill: The Anthology of the Scavenger's Newsletter Killer Frog Contest*. Each year, as you know, Janet runs a contest to unearth "the worst, most overdone tales and poems of horror a reader could encounter." This year's winners (and runnersup) are a briny lot, some of the worst you'll ever see, and I'm green with envy. If you need something to shock you out of the winter blahs, take two froggies and chortle your troubles away. Send \$3.00 to Janet Fox, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523-1329.

Though this issue of 2AM is late coming off the press, Gretta is working hard at getting back on a regular schedule and she assures me the Summer '92 issue will be out on time. She's making some minor design changes that'll improve the look (thanks to suggestions made by Andrew L. Porter, editor and publisher of *Science Fiction Chronicle*, who took time out of his busy schedule at Chicon V to critique the last two issues). With several major newsstand and specialty shop distributors adding 2AM to their regular lists, paid circulation now exceeds one thousand copies of each issue. Congratulations, Gretta. When circ tops 10,000 (say in another two years), I'll have to stop thinking of 2AM as a small press publication.

#### (INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN DATLOW (Cont'd from page 46))

trend is toward psychological horror. It's really hot and it'll probably stay that way for another two years because of the success of Thomas Harris' *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*. It'll eventually subside and give way to something else. Maybe more traditional horror.



# Pickman's Children: A Study of "Subway Horror"

by William Schoell  
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It would be tempting to say that the New York City subway is horrible enough without adding imaginary terrors to its train lines, but in spite of rumors and news reports, it's not as bad as all that. However, many horror writers, myself included, have found the subway system irresistible as a locale for urban tales of the macabre. It's not the muggers or the inhabitants that provide inspiration, but the system itself—so old, so filthy, full of miles and miles of interconnecting tunnels and passageways. And this only the part that passengers see; especially provocative are the many conduits, causeways and recesses that are normally out of sight, only briefly glimpsed as you race by at so many miles an hour. The subway is full of shadowy doorways and abandoned stations and workshops, metal staircases that lead to hidden alcoves and pathways. How can you help imagining that something is down there?

First some facts: the subway is not as horrendous as one might imagine. (Ironically, after living most of my life in New York City, I've only been mugged in the subway once—about two weeks after suggesting this article to our esteemed editor.) They are dirty, and confusing and over-crowded (certainly during rush hour—I'm glad I'm a free-lancer!) and awful things do happen to people down there, but considering the vast numbers that use the subway, the odds for making it to their destinations safely are in the passengers' favor. For such a gigantic system, it's a miracle it works as well as it does. I'm no enamored of riding the subway late at night, but I've done it often over the years and (usually) come away unscathed. Transit cops and Guardian Angels ("vigilante" teens who patrol the subway, bless 'em) are frequently present.

(The most notorious subway incident in recent years, of course, is the Bernie Goetz business: Goetz, who'd been mugged and beaten on at least on one previous occasion, shot several youths who gathered around him in a subway car for ominous purposes. Some feel he over-reacted, that he could have simply held the gun on these guys until they pulled into the station instead of actually firing and possibly possibly endangering others in the subway car. But having just been mugged in the subway myself by some incredibly swift and conscienceless reprobates, I can well understand that Goetz' aim was to not only protect himself but to prevent these creatures from getting the gun away from him and using it on Goetz and others. In retrospect, I don't think he should have spent any time in jail.)

But Bernie Goetz probably hadn't been mugged even for the first time when I was riding the system one night about a decade ago and got the idea for a novel I entitled *The Species*. Something was down there in the subway, down deep, hidden in the recesses and tunnels, and could influence those of us up here above. Anyone who knew of this creature's existence was in jeopardy; if you even spoke about it aloud it could make your body literally quiver into jelly. *The Species* had its good points, but was a bit of a mess with more loose ends than logic. It went into the "not dead; only resting" file while I worked on other projects.

Meanwhile I wasn't the only writer to be inspired by the subway. In 1982 an author named Robert Craig published a novel entitled *Creepers*, which may be the ultimate subway horror story. Craig's premise has a little band of derelicts taking up occupancy in the subway tunnels about ten years after the turn of the century. On their sojourns to the surface they prey on passengers for enough money to buy drinks and other "staples." Subway workers refer to these furtive felons as "creepers." These derelicts have multiplied over the decades and no longer come out of the subway. They have undergone certain physical adaptations and simply feed on human flesh.

The creeper problem is worsening when a Detective Corelli meets up with a young woman whose child was snatched from a subway platform by the creepers. It seems the powers-that-be know about the creeper problem but are trying to keep a lid on it to avoid panic. (Leaving the population at the mercy of isolated creeper attacks!) Corelli and the lady team up, sort of, to find the little girl and get to the bottom of things. A midnight purge of the system by authorities causes masses of creepers to emerge onto 42nd Street and give the muggers and drug pushers a run for their money.

While on occasion I found the human drama and other aspects of the story—the burgeoning romance between Corelli and the mother, for instance—unconvincing, I think that *Creepers* is generally quite scary and suspenseful, and makes good use of its eerie underground locales. (The creepers use an abandoned station as one of their homes.) The basic premise is a solid one, and was undoubtedly influenced by Wells' classic *The Time Machine*, with its flesh-eating underground morlocks (which is also the inspiration for the subway-dwelling mutant "morlocks" in

Marvel Comics *X-Men* series.) *Creepers* also features a Guardian Angel type subway "gang" and employs many actual New York City stations for convincing ambience.

Also in 1982 a novel by John Shirley was published entitled *Cellars*. In this superb horror tome, Shirley expertly creates a paranoid dread surrounding the entire underground world of New York, of which the subway system is just one part. There is a terrible demonic creature—"The Head Underneath"—residing in a subterranean lake beneath the city; this creature can "reach out and touch someone" via the use of hybrid surrogates ("Blessed People") through various means—sewers, drains, utility tunnels, cellar gratings. There is virtually no place of safety because the city aboveground is unalterably connected to the city underground by all these conduits.

Several victims are sucked away by a rising tide of reddish, membranous scum that coagulates into a semi-human form before moving back down the drain with its flattened, squished prey trapped inside. The human thralls of the subterranean creature even have their own subway car that rides unsuspiciously through the system at their bidding. In one scene a car from the regular subway is detached so that the creature's hybrid minions can have their way with the startled passengers.

The basic plot has to do with a writer, Lanyard, who is preparing articles on a series of ritual killings in New York. All the bodies have been carved up in areas located under the city streets: subway stations, laundry rooms; etc. He learns that there is, in effect, a huge cult of people who believe in committing murder, blood sacrifice, for their own personal gain and who seem to have unlimited power—and limited access to wherever they want or need to go above or below the city's byways. The leader of the cult wants the Head Underneath in the secret lake to enable him to transcend time, so that he will be able to experience whatever he is experiencing at "the moment of transcendence"—sex; a drug high, satiation—forever. (In a deliciously ironic moment, it doesn't quite work out that way.)

To reach the underground lake of The Head Underneath, one must catch the "special" railway car, somewhere between Delancy and Grand Central, get off at a certain point at an abandoned station, walk to the edge of the platform, down the metal steps, along the tracks, and then up a ladder, along

a narrow tunnel until you reach an open room with an elevator.... Shirley has imbued his novel with enough rich, eerie atmosphere and details for ten books, and really makes the city of New York—its subways, derelicts, abandoned tenements, more pathetic denizens—into a vibrant, breathing character. The tone of the novel is consistently dark and chilling up until its downbeat, but satisfying, conclusion. There are many deliciously gruesome and inventive passages. In my opinion, *Cellars* is one of the finest horror novels of the eighties.

By 1984 I had already published my first novel and the publisher was itching for a second. I dusted off my dog-eared copy of *The Species* and made a few changes. Originally, the creature was a by-product of genetic engineering, but I decided to make it alien in nature, a bio-mechanical construct. I didn't completely eschew the supernatural approach, however; this creature from another star system has its own gods, and wishes to make a sacrifice to one of them. A human? Two humans? Nope—how about all of the millions of residents on the island of Manhattan! I cleared up some inconsistencies and loose ends and tightened up the writing; otherwise the story—of a man whose younger brother disappears while out jogging one afternoon and who tries to find out just what happened to him—and characters and situations were the same.

This aforementioned biocomp needs workers to build an environment for it underground, and many people are snatched off the street by its human thralls. As the night of its sacrifice draws near, the disappearances increase—instead of derelicts, all sorts of people go missing. Some of these are easily controlled by the biocomp; others go mad and become blood-lusting "renegades" who run wild in the system, savages. The subway system is employed by the creature's human drones to do its bidding, and several characters meet their fates on subway platforms, such as one woman who is dismembered by a speeding train. A psychic character who has inadvertently tapped into the biocomp's "thoughts" keeps sensing an enormous metal door, and has the sensation of a great white rectangle growing larger and larger. He eventually realizes that this rectangle is the little window at the front of the subway car, and the widening white space is the station car as it approaches. Behind the metal door—which he ultimately confronts—lies the lair of the biocomp.

The protagonist of the story, Steven Ericson, descends into the subway system to rescue his brother and sees cars filled to the brim with naked, screaming people being used by the biocomp, some of whom have not been fully usurped in a mental sense but who have no idea of how to break free or where to run to. I submit that the novel, an early work published as *Shivers* in 1985, is probably more of a good read than a "great" horror experience, but it does exploit the terror of

unseen things, pervasive outside influences, and of course the dark hidey-holes and shadowy niches of the subways.

There have been other subway horror stories, of course. *Night-Train*, by Thomas Monteleone, was published in '85 and features mysterious and horrific occurrences in the subway system. A compelling first half leads up to a rather disappointing second half involving, if memory serves me correctly, other-dimensional beings and influences and the like. Perhaps the trouble was that the story doesn't actually stay in the subway. More recently, Skipp and Spector's *The Light at the End* (of the tunnel) deals with a vampiric infestation in New York and has several subway sequences, including the climactic one, which illuminates the title (pun intended), all told in rapid, cha cha cha, quick-close-the-door-before-the-horse-bolts prose that I, at least, found initially energizing if ultimately exhausting. James Herbert's nifty *Domain* is the third in his killer rat trilogy, and features the darling super-rodents on the loose in the London subways after a devastating nuclear strike. It's more of a rat novel than a subway one. Haunted train stations figure in John R. Maxim's rather original *Platforms*, but these stations are on the commuter railway, of all places, and not in the subway system.

Clive Barker tried his hand at New York subway horror in volume one of his *Books of Blood*. His inspiration for the story "The Midnight Meat Train" was the real life New York subway slasher who got on the F train at the 23rd St.-Ely station more than once, pulled out a machete, and just started hacking at the nearest passenger for unaccountable reasons. Barker's story, about a killer loose in the subways naturally, is scary, interesting, and has some effective moments, but Barker oughta stay out of cabs when next he visits New York and actually descend into the system with the rest of us mere mortals so that he won't make mistakes like the one he makes in "Midnight Meat Train." He has blood flowing from one car to the next, which is highly improbable—as the blood would simply spill onto the tracks when it reached the little platforms and couplings (and space) in between each car or drip onto the wheel carriage between cars on some lines.

(I'm reminded of a scene in Hubert Selby Jr.'s nominal horror novel, *Demon*, in which a man is pushed in front of a subway car by the psychopathic "hero." Selby describes the people on the platform being splattered with the victim's blood. He must have been thinking of Boston, where many of the tracks are on the same level as the waiting passengers. In New York, subway trains are in a kind of well, the tracks and wheels several feet below the platform; which is flush with the bottom of the subway car doors. The body of any one hit by a train on the tracks would be covered up and hidden from view by the train rolling over him; any "spurring blood" couldn't get past the floor bottom of the subway car; thank goodness.

Aren't you glad you know these things?)

There have also been several horror films that take place in the New York City or another subway system. There's *C.H.U.D.* (Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers), which has a somewhat similar premise to *Creepers* and is a creditable, if minor, story of creatures stalking the subways for human flesh. (*C.H.U.D. 2* was recently released on video.) An earlier British film, *Raw Meat*, ('73) is also similar to *Creepers*, although it takes place in London's underground "tubes." It's about descendants of people who were trapped years before in an abandoned station, and who rise forth to snack upon frenzied British passengers. The fairly dreadful *Maniac* features Joe Spinell and actual New York City subway tunnels in the story of a demented man who corners, kills, and scalps a number of innocent women. *Dressed to Kill*, Brian De Palma's well-crafted thriller, features an amusing scene when heroine Nancy Allen is caught between the killer on one end of a train, and a gang bent on robbery, rape, or worse on the other.

No article on subway horror would be complete without a mention of the greatest subway horror tale of them all: H. P. Lovecraft's "Pickman's Model." This is the story that hints of the existence of a dog-like race living in catacombs beneath the streets of Boston. The basic plot has nothing to do with any subway, but for our purposes its most interesting aspect relates to the mention of an incident wherein these creatures allegedly swarmed out of the furrows and crevices to attack en masse a group of passengers waiting at the Boylston Street station.... just like morlocks, creepers, renegades....

And the beat goes on. It's hard to resist: the idea that, beneath the pipes and clutter, below our feet, past the rumbling metal monsters, under the tracks, there's something else, down there, hidden, just waiting... waiting for a fertile imagination or the right moment to bring them into splendid, shuddery existence.

## TWO SECONDS TO TWO

## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE TRINITY PARADOX** by Kevin J. Anderson and Doug Beason (Bantam/Spectra, Nov 91, ISBN 0-553-29246-3, 325 pages, \$4.99; pb) Somebody should recommend this novel for a Nebula. Few hard science fiction novels are this well written and well researched, and fewer still are capable of injecting the reader into the minds of its characters with such force. Elizabeth Devane is an anti-nuke activist (and former defense contractor employee with an MBA) who's hurtled back in time to 1943 Los Alamos when she and her boyfriend try to sabotage an experiment at modern-day Los Alamos. Jeff is immediately killed (he arrives in 1943 with his legs fused together and part of him missing), but Elizabeth survives to be mistaken for one of the many new arrivals at the relatively unsophisticated and fairly disorganized Manhattan Project processing center. With her knowledge of future events, Elizabeth sees her presence at the birth of the A-bomb as an opportunity to change things for the better. Elizabeth miscalculates (literally and figuratively), and all hell breaks loose. When Edward Teller, using Elizabeth's doctored calculations in an experiment, accidentally blows himself up in 1943 (is killed a full decade before he's supposed to invent the hydrogen bomb), the timeline is inextricably altered and anything becomes possible: Nazi Germany can win the war, Dewey can beat FDR in 1944, and Elizabeth herself can become the cursed inventor of the atomic bomb! This is a great read. Very highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**RELIFE** by Dan Barton (Pocket Books, Jul 91, ISBN 0-671-67639-3, 293 pages, \$4.95 US; pb) RELIFE has all the elements of an excellent mystery (including a character named Stuart Kaminski, a well-known mystery writer in real life but a psychologist in Barton's novel).

One of the best ways to build character in a mystery novel, of course, is to start from scratch and have the reader discover people, places and events at the same time the protagonist does. Since Tom Maxwell has amnesia and remembers nothing about his past, the reader slowly learns about Tom Maxwell as Tom uncovers the mystery of his unsavory life and possible suicide attempt that might have been successfully carried out. Is Tom Maxwell alive or dead?

Has he somehow—magically, mysteriously—been reborn after committing suicide?

RELIFE is a fast-paced novel that holds up well throughout. Recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**SHADOW OF THE SEVENTH MOON** by Nancy Varian Berberick (Ace, Mar 91, ISBN 0-441-76055-4, 303 pages, \$4.50 US; pb) Berberick is an author who worked her way up

through the small press and is still involved in many of the groups and workshops. **SHADOW** is her third novel and there's one more coming.

**SHADOW** follows a single character; Garroc, one of the last Dwarfs, as Garroc struggles to cope not only with life but with some internal decisions centering around friendship, loyalty, faith and memory. The novel is set in Britain, during the dark ages, and Berberick has captured perfectly the mix of Saxon and Welsh cultures. Garroc is a scout for a young King recently come to power and as such plays a crucial role in the shaping of the politics of the land. Garroc is also a Dwarf, and thus cursed with being unable to have children and knowing that he will be one of the last of his race.

**SHADOW** is not an action novel, although there is certainly a great deal of fighting and conflict. Nor is it a political novel, although politics play a crucial role in both the story and in Garroc's life. Rather, **SHADOW** is the story of one Dwarf and the choices he has made, does make and must make in the future. Berberick captures these internal dilemmas directly related. In a sense, **SHADOW** is a character study, and the only complaint I have, and it's an extremely minor one, is that the novel is told through the vehicle of Garroc telling his life's story to someone else. We therefore know that he will survive all battles and conflicts beforehand. This somewhat lessens the drama inherent in some of his struggles, but as I mentioned before, you don't necessarily read this for the action.

A final note concerning the use of language and Berberick's use of it. Throughout the novel, Berberick liberally sprinkles Celtic words and phrases. This lends itself well to setting the mood for the book and while it may make the reader struggle at the beginning, it's worth the effort. The Author's note at the beginning of the book is a must read as Berberick details not only some history but proper pronunciation.

All in all this is a wonderful book for anyone who loves history and loves to get lost in the rich detail of the past. We end up being more Garroc's friend than an outside observer, and any book that can draw the reader that deep into its pages is a book well worth buying—and an author well worth following.

—reviewed by Steven Sawicki

**FAIR GAME** by S. W. Bradford (Jove, Jan 92, ISBN 0-515-10749-2, 312 pages, \$4.99; pb) When best-selling PI writer Kathleen Brown moves out of the LA apartment she shares with a boyfriend (she thinks he's a nice guy but not Mr. Right) and buys a four-bedroom house in suburban Yuppie-heaven Magdalena, she begins to get obscene phone calls and not-so-

veiled death threats. Then she receives, through the mail, a videotape of an actual murder to prove her tormentors are capable of carrying out their threats. Following the plot of one her own novels, the killers stalk Kathleen and force her to hire a real private detective. Suspenseful reading that's lots of fun. Recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**COLD BLOOD** edited by Richard Chizmar (Mark V. Ziesing, ISBN 0-929480-57-0, 401 pages, \$25.00; hc) Doug Winter contemplates real murder in his introduction to these fine stories about modern-day serial killers—psychological horror at its best. Several stand-out stories: Brian Hodge's "Cancer Causes Rats" about the special relationship between a TV anchorwoman and a rapist/serial killer; F. Paul Wilson's Repairman Jack tale, "Home Repairs"; and superb tales by Chet Williamson, Ronald Kelly, Joe R. Lansdale (the play version of "By Bizarre Hands"), John Shirley, Bentley Little, Brian Hodge, Barry Hoffman, Thomas F. Monteleone, Ardash Mayharg, Rex Miller, Roman A. Ranieri, James Kinsner, J. N. Williamson, Paul F. Olson, Nancy A. Collins, William F. Nolan, Rick Hautala, Ed Gorman, Richard Laymon, William Relling Jr., Andrew Vachas, David B. Silva, Ramsey Campbell, and Tom Elliott. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**SPECTERS** by J. M. Dillard (Dell Abyss, May 91, ISBN 0-440-20758-4, 374 pages, \$4.50; pb) Dillard is a wonderful writer who's turned her hand to horror after crafting some of the better Star Trek novels. Dr. Feinman (Rolf Brunner) is a respected pediatrician with a split personality (Rolf's personality was arrested in childhood by an abusive mother and a father who seldom admitted to having a bastard son). The adult Feinman becomes a child abuser of the vilest sort, sexually exploiting little girls and then murdering them for his perverse pleasure. Avra, one of Brunner's earliest victims, lived (with the help of her telepathic sister) to grow up into a beautiful young woman. When, purely by accident, she discovers Brunner is now practicing pediatrics in the same town under the name of Feinman, Avra contemplates revenge. Unfortunately, Feinman identifies Avra and her sister at the same time, and the devilish doctor sets out to accomplish with the adult women what he failed to do when they were children. A gripping, fast-paced psychological thriller with a handful of supernatural elements thrown in for good measure. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE GARDEN OF RAMA** by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee (Bantam Spectra, 441 pages,

**\$20.00. THE GARDEN OF RAMA** is the sequel to Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee's *RAMA II*, itself a sequel to Clarke's classic *RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA*. It picks up shortly after the conclusion of the last novel, as the uninhabited Rama probe rockets its way out of the solar system with a crew of Earth explorers trapped on board. In the process, Clarke and Lee tell us a little bit more about the Ramans, the as-yet unseen race which built the probe, and quite a bit about humanity as well.

Over the first part of the book, we travel with the explorers on their journey beyond the stars. As they go in the years which pass, relationships are born, as are children, and family units evolve, such as they may given the small sampling of humanity available. In some ways, this portion of the novel is strongly reminiscent of the free-love theories put forth in some of Robert Heinlein's novels.

The probe eventually reaches a waystation in space, where it undergoes refitting while the Terrans are given a new mission: to return to Earth and recruit 2,000 Earth people to inhabit a special Earth-like habitat being constructed inside the Rama probe.

And when they return and complete this mission, the novel turns darkly Orwellian. It seems that humanity at its worst comes out in the colonists. The government which is established rapidly becomes corrupt, using the outbreak of a deadly AIDS-like virus which attacks the heart muscle to gain control over the population. Gangsters quickly place themselves in real control of the colony, and their xenophobia assumes new dimensions as they become first aware, and then afraid, of the existence of a colony of aliens outside their own habitat.

The novel serves as a long allegory, suggesting that perhaps simplistic family values should govern the affairs of men, since government corrupts and destroys in the end. This may be a simplistic message, but the authors put it across convincingly, especially given the current state of affairs in the world.

Clarke and Lee are supposed to have one more Rama tale in the wings, in which we should finally get to have a true rendezvous with Rama. Although neither of these new novels have been as good as the original, nevertheless, it should be interesting to finally get where they've been taking us for over 20 years now.

—reviewed by Tyson Blue

**THE BRUTAL BALLET** by Wayne D. Dundee (A Joe Hannibal Mystery) (Dell Jan 92, ISBN 0-440-20719-3, 310 pages, \$3.99, pb) Dundee, founding editor of *Hardboiled Magazine* and author of *THE BURNING SEASON* and *THE SKINTIGHT SHROUD* (and a budding horror and suspense writer in his spare time), is emerging as the nineties' grand master of the hardboiled PI genre. Dundee is a consummate craftsman who creates well-rounded characters readers can easily identify with: ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary situation that tests their mettle and leaves an indelible mark on those who survive. Because greed, lust, envy, pride, adultery, blackmail,

murder—the trademarks of any hardboiled Hannibal story—are ultimately tempered in this story by camaraderie, love, competitive spirit, self-sacrifice, loyalty, expose, and Hannibal's own brand of ultimate justice, *THE BRUTAL BALLET* leaves readers aware that, despite lots of bad things happening to good people, there is some sense of balance to the world after all. *THE BRUTAL BALLET* is a uniquely satisfying book. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**DUMFORD BLOOD** by S.K. Epperson (St. Martin's, Nov 91, ISBN 0-312-06342-3, 296 pages, \$18.95; hc) **BROTHER LOWDOWN** was a brilliant first suspense novel, and **DUMFORD BLOOD** shows that Epperson isn't just a one-novel writer but can continually create believable characters readers can care about: brooding Ben Portlock, Lovely Lura Taylor, pregnant Edie Jackson, bunsybody Hannah Winegarten, ladykiller Bryce McKee, looney Annette Taylor, psychic Mrs. Miller. Will Ben and Lura set aside their pride and overcome the hurt they've caused each other in time to save each other from a serial killer's gutting knife? Or is Lura really the demented killer and Ben a deluded fool? Well-written, suspenseful, highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE WRITER'S DIGEST HANDBOOK OF SHORT STORY WRITING VOLUME II** edited by Jean M. Fredette (Writer's Digest Books, ISBN 0-89879-463-3, Aug 91, 239 pages, \$12.95; pb) At long last the supplementary text currently used in Writer's Digest School's "Writing to Sell" fiction course is available in relatively inexpensive paperback. Chapters by John Updike, James Gunn, Lawrence Sanders, Robert Cormier, Orson Scott Card, Michael A. Banks, Robyn Carr, Rust Hills, Roy Sorrells, Dwight Swain, Esther M. Friesner, Darrell Schweitzer, and others show beginning writers the ins and outs of storycrafting. Even old pros like myself pick up valuable pointers by skimming through this book at least once a year.

—reviewed by Paul Dale Anderson

**1992 GUIDE TO LITERARY AGENTS & ART/PHOTO REPS** edited by Robin Gee (Writer's Digest Books, Sep 91, ISBN 0-89879-485-4, 250 pages, \$15.95; hc) A new addition to Writer's Digest's line of annual directories, this slim volume is an excellent guide for new writers thinking about obtaining their first agent. Fee-charging and non-fee-charging agents are listed in different sections. How best to contact each agent, the types of material each agent markets, commission charges, recent sales, and literary conferences/conventions each agent usually attends is the type of useful information contained in the various listings. There are helpful articles by Richard Curtis, Michael Larsen, Eileen Fallon, Evan Marshall, Kerry Cox, and others on "How Agents Find Clients" and how to know when it's time to change agents. Only agents actively seeking new clients are listed in this directory (top agents who have more

clients than they can effectively handle or agents who only represent previously published authors are noticeably absent.) A valuable addition to any author's bookshelf.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**SHOCK ROCK** edited by Jeff Gell (Pocket Books, Jan 92, ISBN 0-671-70150-0, 270 pages, \$4.99; pb) Featuring the first new Stephen King short story in almost a year and a forward by Alice Cooper, **SHOCK ROCK** focuses on the relationship between rock and roll and horror. Graham Masterton's "Voodoo Child", F. Paul Wilson's sf-ish "Bob Dylan, Troy Jonson, and the Speed Queen" and John Shirley's "Flaming Telepaths" are three truly standout stories. Other tales include "Odeed" by David J. Schow, "Vargr Rule" by Nancy A. Collins, "Blood Suede Shoes" by Donald Kella, "The Dead Beat Society" by Ron d'Amassa, "Rites of Spring" by Paul Dale Anderson, "Dedicated to the One I Loathe" by Michael Garrett, "Requiem" by Brian Hedge, "Heavy Metal" by R. Patrick Gates, "Bunkey" by Rex Miller, "The Black '59" by Bill Mumy and Peter David, "Groupies" by Richard Christian Matheson, "Reunion" by Michael Newton, "Boogie" by Mark Verheiden, "Weird Gig" by Ray Garton, "Hide n' Plain Sight" by John L. Byrne, and "Addicted to Love" by Thomas Tesser. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**SHERWOOD** by Parke Godwin (Morrow, 527 pages, \$20.00) What with all the recently-revived interest in the legends of Robin Hood, including the hit film with Kevin Costner and its imminent release on videotape, I came to Parke Godwin's novel *SHERWOOD* with a great deal of enthusiasm. It wasn't disappointing.

Godwin has written a number of science fiction and fantasy novels, including some about the Arthurian legend, and so he is no stranger to the milieu in which Robin moves. But what he has done is to play fast and loose with the framework of the Robin Hood tales in order to bring a fresh approach to old material, and the result is a fascinating novel which delivers enough familiar faces in enough new places to make for a book which will surprise and delight all but the most hidebound of fans.

Most readers today think that the legend of Robin Hood has always associated him with the era of Richard the Lion-Hearted. However, this is a conceit which lies mainly at the feet of a number of turn-of-the-century children's books and the Douglas Fairbanks and Errol Flynn films of the '20s and '30s. Godwin has uprooted Robin and his men from that time period and moved them several hundred years back to the time of William the Conqueror, where the situation is the same—England oppressed by a ruthless tyrant—and yet new at the same time.

Perhaps the most intriguing change he has made concerns Robin's arch-foe, the Sheriff of Nottingham. He has always been a one-dimensional character, either portrayed as a buffoon, as in the Errol Flynn film, or a megalomaniac, as in Alan Richman's delightfully wicked performance in the Costner film.

Here, however, he is given a name—Ralf FitzGerald—and a background which makes him a much richer and more sympathetic character than ever before.

Another added dimension is the introduction of a powerful erotic attraction between the Sheriff and Maid Marion, which at times threatens her relationship with Robin.

Readers looking for some of the trademark events of accepted Robin Hood lore will find them all here—the Merry Men, albeit with slightly different names; the famous archery contest; the robbing from the rich to benefit the poor, etc.—but altered to fit the new framework Godwin has created.

But by far the most daring change in *SHERWOOD* is a surprising plot twist near the end of the novel which places Robin and Ralf in the unprecedented role of allies. Far be it from me to reveal precisely how this comes about, but suffice it to say that it makes perfect sense in context of the events.

Godwin has written a novel which merely uses the accepted legends as a starting point for a daring new look at one of the most enduring—and stereotyped—characters in all folklore. The result is a novel which will be hauntingly familiar to readers, but can still deliver page after page of surprises.

The best news is that this is but the first of two novels Godwin plans about Robin Hood. The second, *THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE RING*, is in the works.

—reviewed by Tyson Blue

**FINAL SHADOWS** edited by Charles L. Grant (Doubleday, Sep 91, ISBN 0-385-24732-X, 490 pages, \$20.00 US; hc) Most of us who write short horror fiction have been permanently influenced by Charlie Grant's *SHADOWS* anthologies. Like Kirby Maccauley's *DARK FORCES*, the early *SHADOWS* volumes presented original stories unlike anything most readers had seen before. Instrumental in making the genre what it is today (and introducing many "name" horror writers

to the public for the first time), *SHADOWS* has become an inspiration to every anthology editor—not just those anthologizing horror, science fiction, or fantasy, but mainstream editors as well. This twelfth and final volume is as good as any of its predecessors. Despite the demise of the *SHADOWS* series, Grant proves that horror fiction is alive and well in the 90s. Great stories by Wendy Webb, Stephen Gallagher, Julie R. Good, Brian Hodge, Lori Negridge Allen, Brian Lumley, Melanie Tem, Bill Pronzini, Peter Tremayne, Nancy Holder, Norman Partridge, Samantha Lee, Michael Bishop, Colin Greenland, Kim Antieau, Jessica Palmer, Karen Habor, Guy N. Smith, Graham Masterton, Bernard Taylor, Tanith Lee, Mike Chinn, Craig Shaw Gardner, Chet Williamson, Lynn S. Hightower, Dennis Etchison, Jack Cady, Julien Brantingham, Nicholas Royle, Sharon Webb, David Sutton, Mark Morris, Ashley McConnell, Brian Mooney and Stephen Jones, David S. Garnett, and David Morrell. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**MEMORYMAKERS** by Brian Herbert & Marie Landis (ROC, Jul 91, ISBN 0-451-45090-6, 206 pages, \$3.99 US, \$4.99 Canada, pb) This is a first novel—sort of. While Brian Herbert has written a number of books, his cousin, Marie Landis, has stayed mostly in the short story field. This is her first attempt at a novel.

The story centers around the division of the human race into two groups—the Gweens, who go about life from day to day oblivious that they are nothing more than cattle—and the Ch'Var, who look like Gweens, but certainly don't act like them. The Ch'Var are a superior race, or so they think, with their own language, their own inventing corps—who produce a number of technological marvels—their own leadership, and a very special hunger for Gween flesh and memories. It seems the Ch'Var are also a dying race and need to be infused with fresh, happy memories

in order to survive. They do this by preying on Gween children and by stealing their memories through the use of Nebulons which they extract from their own tear ducts, insert into a Gween child's eye and then wait to collect the memory-latent liquid that pours back out. Unfortunately, the process leaves the child little more than a vegetable.

*MEMORYMAKERS* follows one Ch'Var in particular as he goes about his business and as he finally runs into a pair of children who will change the future of the Ch'Var.

The writing is fast paced and clear and the only real problem I had with the novel related more to author's choice than anything else. For example, the above related memory-stealing process seemed a bit unbelievable to me. I just had a hard time imagining it happening. Secondly, if the Ch'Var have this superior inventing corps, why have they not done more to control the Gweens as we do herds of cows. Letting your life's blood run around on the loose seems a formula for disaster. There are other examples of small things which nagged at me as I read the book, but they are really nothing more than annoyances to what was a pretty good story and some pretty good writing. Won't win any awards, but it is entertaining and quick reading.

—reviewed by Steven Sawicki

**1992 POET'S MARKET** by Judson Jerome (Writer's Digest Books, Sep 91, ISBN 0-89879-475-7, 517 pages, \$19.95; hc) Judson Jerome died of cancer a few months before the release of the '92 *POET'S MARKET* (and just before the release of a new book of Jud's own poetry that he was supposed to autograph). His loss is felt deeply by the entire writing community, but his legacy lives on in this indispensable publication from *Writer's Digest Books* that lists virtually all reputable markets for poetry that are open to freelance submissions. Jerome, the monthly poetry columnist for *Writer's Digest Magazine* for almost as long as I can remember, was a wise and

About *BORDERLAND*, from the January 1, 1992 issue of *KIRKUS REVIEWS*:

"This latest Kansas gothic from hard-working Epperson (Brother Lowdown, Dumford Blood) features a truly monstrous town—Denke, Kansas—whose main industries are kidnapping and theft and whose leading amusements are rape, murder, and cannibalism....

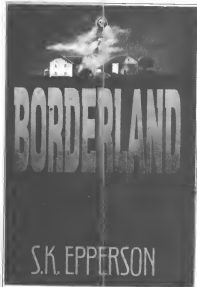
The variety and sheer number of threats to her unlikely heroes take Epperson way over the top; the second half of this witches' brew reads like the most exhaustive catalogue of atrocities since the glory days of the Marquis de Sade."

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gentle man who had the patience and knowledge to be a good mentor. His sage advice in the opening sections of this massive directory is worth the price of the book.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BEST NEW HORROR** edited by Stephen Jones & Ramsey Campbell (Carroll & Graf, Oct. 91, ISBN 0-88184-762-3, 390 pages, \$10.95; pb). This first volume of reprints from 1989 includes Donald Burleson's "Snow Cancellations" from 2AM, Robert R. McCammon's "Pin," Cherry Wilder's "The House on Cemetery Street," Stephen Gallagher's "The Horn," Alex Quiroba's "Breaking Up," "It Helps if You Sing" by Ramsey Campbell, "Closed Circuit" by Laurence Staig, "Carnal House" by Steve Rasnic Tem, "Twitch Technicolor" by Kim Newman, "Li-zaveta" by Gregory Frost, "Archway" by Nicholas Royle, "The Strange Design of Master Rignolo" by Thomas Ligotti, "...To Feel Another's Woe" by Chet Williamson, "The Last Day of Miss Dorinda Molyneux" by Robert Westall, "No Sharks in the Med" by Brian Lumley, "Mort au Monde" by D. F. Lewis, "Blanca" by Thomas Tessier, "The Eye of the Ayatollah" by Ian Watson, "At First Just Ghostly" by Karl Edward Wagner, "Bad News" by Richard Laymon, and an Introduction ("Horror in 1989, an excellent overview of the genre including mention of most small press magazines) by the editors, and a necrology (a listing of all those big name writers who died during the year). This is a refreshing addition to the year's best anthologies. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BEST NEW HORROR 2** edited by Stephen Jones & Ramsey Campbell (Carroll & Graf, Nov. 91, ISBN 0-88184-736-4, 433 pages, \$20.95; hc). Hot on the heels of the 1989 selections, in the first volume of this international "year's best" series, comes the editors' picks for notable stories published in 1990. The 2nd volume includes the wonderful overview of British and US publications and the annual necrology, plus even more stories from a wide variety of well-known and obscure sources. Stories include "The First Time" by K. W. Jeter, "A Short Guide to the City" by Peter Straub, "Stephen" by Elizabeth Massie, "The Dead Love You" by Jonathan Carroll, "Jane Doe #112" by Harlan Ellison, "Shock Radio" by Ray Garton, "The Man Who Drew Cats" by Michael Marshall Smith, "The Co-Op" by Melanie Tem, "Negatives" by Nicholas Royle, "The Last Feast of Harlequin" by Thomas Ligotti, "172nd Sale" by Ian R. MacLeod, "Cedar Lane" by Karl Edward Wagner, "At a Window Facing West" by Kim Antieau, "Inside the Walled City" by Garry Kilworth, "On the Wing" by Jean-Daniel Broque, "Firebird" by J. L. Comeau, "Incident on a Rainy Night in Beverly Hills" by David J. Schow, "His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood" by Poppy Z. Brite, "The Original Dr. Shade" by Kim Newman, "Madge" by D. F. Lewis, "Alive in Venice" by Cherry Wilder, "Divertimento" by Gregory Frost, "Pelts" by F. Paul Wilson, "Those of Rhenea" by David Sutton, "Lord of the Land"

by Gene Wolfe, "Aquarium" by Steve Rasnic Tem, "Mister Ice Cold" by Gahan Wilson, and "On the Town Route" by Elizabeth Hand. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**NEEDFUL THINGS** by Stephen King (Viking, Oct. 91, ISBN 0-670-83953-1, 690 pages, \$24.95; hc). King is back in full form (like an old friend telling us a story while rocking hypnotically, rhythmically, on the front porch of a neighbor's house at sundown), and so are many of the characters from earlier novels and stories set in Castle Rock back for a final curtain call. *NEEDFUL THINGS* is downright scary. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE WASTELANDS: THE DARK TOWER BOOK III** by Stephen King. Plume, ISBN 0-452-26740-4, Jan. 92, 422 pages, \$15.00; pb. The world has moved on, and I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto. Jake's back, and so are Susannah, Della, Eddie, and Roland of Gilead—better known as THE GUNSLINGER—and the four friends set out on the yellow brick road to find the Dark Tower. Both Roland and Jake, separated since the end of the first volume when The Man in Black made Roland choose between the boy's life and The Dark Tower, are plagued with voices in their heads telling them that there may be more than one reality (or maybe more than one time-space continuum; Jake died in one reality, but is alive in another). Finding the keys that unlock the doors between NYC and Mid-World (actually, Mid-World does remind one a bit of Kansas and Roland reminds one more than a little of Matt Dillon, the intrepid marshal of Dodge City, Kansas), Jake is drawn into Mid-World by the force of ka-tet that binds the four to fate. Choo-Choo! All aboard King's allegory for a ride you'll never forget! Very highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**1992 WRITER'S MARKET** edited by Mark Kissing (Writer's Digest Books, Sep. 91, ISBN 0-89879-472-2, 998 pages, \$25.95; hc). Every year since 1971, when the 1972 WRITER'S MARKET appeared in bookstores (20 years ago now; it sold for \$8.95 back then), I've purchased a personal copy of this invaluable reference work to keep next to my typewriter. Much of what I know of the business of writing (manuscript format, logging submissions, keeping track of expenses for tax purposes, etc.), I gleaned from the pages of WRITER'S MARKET. More importantly, though, is the up-to-date listings of open markets: Consumer Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror magazines (2AM is listed on p. 589); book publishers; organizations; and screenwriting markets. You probably already know you can't freelance effectively without access to the information in WRITER'S MARKET, but let me remind you anyway. At \$25.95, it's still a real deal.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BATMAN: CAPTURED BY THE ENGINES**

by Joe R. Lansdale (Warner Books, Jul. 91, ISBN 0-446-36042-2, 241 pages, \$4.99; pb). Gear up for an arcane mixture of CHRISTINE and The Transformers: a fast-paced tale that's sure to hook your horn. CAPTURED BY THE ENGINES is a supernatural who-dunnit capable of standing alone as a well-written mystery story, but the addition of Bob Kane's Dark Knight is wonderfully interwoven into the plotline (a plot that capitalizes on Bruce Wayne's dual personality) by an expert prose stylist, and the crazy combination works. Lansdale's image of a car, like a rubber toy (or a surrealistic scene out of Roger Rabbit), crawling down the outside wall of a Gotham City hospital after killing a man on the hospital's 4th floor is positively brilliant. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE STAKE** by Richard Laymon (St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-06016-5, 441 pages, \$19.95; hb). If you're curious about where a horror writer finds his ideas or interested in learning how he develops those ideas into a written work, you'll want to read Laymon's newest nasty. Dick Laymon intersperses secrets of the writer's craft (and, I suspect, one or two personal writing secrets—including a tribute to *Mystery Scene* magazine) between scenes of graphic horror that are truly frightening. Laymon leaves lingering doubts whether this is a supernatural tale or pure psychological horror with man-made monsters. Only the surprise ending puts the reader's doubts to rest, leaving open the possibility of a sequel. Extremely well written and rippling with suspense. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BOY'S LIFE** by Robert R. McCammon (Pocket Books, Aug. 91, ISBN 0-671-74226-4, 440 pages, \$21.95; hc). BOY'S LIFE is a wonderful and macabre tale, filled to the brim with life—and death. You can't have one without the other, now can you? No sir. Life and death go together like love and marriage. They belong together like (and are as inseparable as) a boy and his bicycle.

And, in this novel, the boy's (his name is Cory Mackenson, though we suspect this is actually an autobiographical novel and Cory is really a pseudonym; for McCammon himself) bicycle has a special life and death of its own—as well as its own name: Bullet. Actually, there are two bicycles named Bullet in this tale. One is an ordinary bicycle on its last rusty legs when the novel opens; the other is a mystical given (complete with an eye and mind of its own) to Cory as a reward for saving another boy's life.

BOY'S LIFE is about the life and death of a town called Zephyr and everyone and everything in it: Cory's first bicycle, a car called Midnight Mona (and its teenaged driver), a beloved pet, a good friend, a stranger handcuffed to the steering wheel of a drowned car, and a set of beliefs (that made the Deep South (and maybe all of rural America) what it was in the days (the early sixties) before the lives and deaths of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King Jr. changed us all forever.

It's no coincidence that McCammon's voice sounds a lot like William Faulkner's poetic Old-Southern voice throughout this allegorical tale of a Deep South that deserved to disappear—as some economists might claim home milk delivery deserved to disappear with the advent of modern supermarkets—but is evidently still alive (or reborn) in the persona of ex-KKK Grand Wizard David Duke.

BOY'S LIFE is a wonderful, magical metaphor that deserves to live forever. Very highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BORDERLANDS II** edited by Thomas F. Monteleone (Avon, Dec 91, ISBN 0-380-76517-9, 292 pages, \$4.99; pb) Stories in the first *BORDERLANDS* won tons of awards, and the 2nd volume should garner just as many, if not more, awards. Lois Tilton's "Chrysalis" gets my nomination for a Stoker from the current offering (Dave Silva's "The Calling" got my nomination last year). Like "The Calling" (and like Joe Lansdale's hard-hitting "The Doll: A Fable" in *BORDERLANDS 2*), Tilton's tale is wonderfully metaphorical. Mrs. Vivian wakes up one morning to discover her husband's cast-off earthly shell in bed beside her; while she slept, her husband of thirty years had metamorphosed and passed on to his promised reward. How she wishes she could do the same! Soon, happily, her own metamorphosis begins. Tilton imagines all the fine details, comparing the process to giving birth. It's a great story, folks. The entire anthology is highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE COVENANT OF THE FLAME** by David Morrell (Warner, 452 pages, \$19.95) With *THE COVENANT OF THE FLAME*, David Morrell delivers his best thriller yet, a novel which manages to make several valid points about our world and what we are doing to it, while at the same time generating enough action and suspense to keep readers turning pages long after they should have stopped for the night.

The novel tells the story of Tess Drake, a young woman who is suddenly thrust into the middle of a nightmare when a young man she has just met is horribly murdered, burned to death in a public park by a mysterious group of killers. When, accompanied by an intrigued New York missing persons detective, she visits the man's apartment and finds several strange items, she finds herself marked for death as well.

Thus begins a race against time, as Tess and her friend Lt. Craig try to stay alive long enough to learn the secret of their pursuers before they are caught and killed. In a chase which leads from New York to Washington, and eventually to a climax in a cavern in the wilds of the Spanish mountains, the pair face death dozens of times as they fight to make it through the next hour, and to learn the secret for which someone has decreed they must die.

And just to make things really interesting, there appears to be yet another group of killers keeping pace with the pair, not to kill them, but to protect them and destroy their would-be

assassins. Although he is better known as the creator of the character of John Rambo in his first novel, *FIRST BLOOD*, Morrell's later novels have been hallmarked by this complex pattern of cross and double-cross. Novels such as *THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ROSE*, the basis for a popular miniseries a few years back, and last year's *THE FIFTH PROFESSION* have featured this complicated interweaving of plotting.

Also, this novel continues to explore Morrell's apparent interest in the permutations of ancient religious belief in the modern world. That concern, the constant battle to decide whose is the one true faith lies at the very heart of this novel. Although several of Morrell's earlier novels explored the similarities between religious orders and the espionage community, this is the first one in which religion plays a decisive role.

For the first time, ecological concerns play an important part in a Morrell novel. For while Tess and Lt. Craig are fighting for their lives, someone is also going around the world and killing those people who have been responsible in some way for the destruction of the planet's environment. This is interesting, since Morrell pulls off the interesting trick of making the reader sympathize with the aims of his villains, if not their methods. It's hard, for example, to work up much sympathy for the plight of the ivory poacher who meets a singularly appropriate fate on the plains of Africa, or the oil-tanker captain whose drunkenness caused a large oil spill.

Tess Drake is Morrell's first female protagonist, and much is made of this in the book's jacket copy. It is to his credit that she emerges as a believable, strong character, one the reader cares about and is willing to accompany on her quest to save her life and unravel the layers of mystery which surround her.

This summer, there are any number of fine novels competing for your time and attention—Peter Benchley has invited us to go swimming with a giant squid, James Bond is back in action, Louis L'Amour has swung Hopalong Cassidy into the saddle again, and Stephen King is warming up in the wings to take us back to Castle Rock, Maine, one final time. But in the meantime, if you don't let David Morrell take you along on Tess Drake's quest for *THE COVENANT OF THE FLAME*, you'll really be missing something.

—reviewed by Tyson Blue

**THE BRADBURY CHRONICLES: STORIES IN HONOR OF RAY BRADBURY** edited by William F. Nolan and Martin H. Greenberg (ROC, Nov 91, 328 pages, \$19.95; hc) Like last year's *LOVECRAFT'S LEGACY* (issued on the 100th anniversary of Lovecraft's birth), this is a tribute anthology to another writer who has had a seminal influence on all the contributors (and is issued on the 50th anniversary of Bradbury's first fiction sale). Bradbury is still alive, fortunately, and included in this volume is a marvelous original Ray Bradbury story about a foolish psychiatrist and a crazy old man who lives under a bridge and calls himself a Troll. The shrink tries to convince the

old man that he's crazy, but we all know it's the psychiatrist that's crazy. We, the children of the world, still believe in trolls—and Bradbury is one of us, still a child at heart. All the stories in this wonderful anthology are marvelous, but my favorites are James Kiser's retelling of "Mars is Heaven!" (picking up the plotline where Bradbury left off) and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's "Salome". There's also an appreciation of Bradbury by Isaac Asimov, an intro by Nolan, and a splendid afterword by Ray himself to round out the book. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**DEAD END: CITY LIMITS** edited by Paul F. Olson and David B. Silva (St Martin's, Oct 91, ISBN 0-312-06328-8, 342 pages \$19.95; hc) The much-awaited second Olson and Silva anthology is out (*POST MORTEM*, their first antho is also just out in paperback from Dell Abyss), and it's almost impossible to find in stores. Try Weinberg Books, the Overlook Connection, or Nick Certo for copies. There's a short forward by F. Paul Wilson (about the seige mentality in cities), a lengthy introduction by the editors (a distillate on the fate of anthologies), and interesting stories by Lawrence Watt-Evans, Melissa Mia Hall, Charles L. Grant, John Shirley, Chet Williamson, Thomas F. Monteleone, Lois Tilton, Stephen Gresham, William Felling Jr., Charles deLint, David Bischoff, Gene O'Neill, Elizabeth Massie, Lee Moler, Steve Rasnic Tem, Poppy Z. Brite, and Gary L. Raver. My favorites are "Changing Neighborhood" by Lois Tilton, a sensitive tale about neighbors getting to know one another, and Thomas Monteleone's "The White Man". Recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**MASTERING FICTION WRITING** by Kit Reed (Writer's Digest Books, Sep 91, ISBN 0-89879-479-X, 141 pages, \$18.95; hc) Kit Reed, author of the excellent *ELEMENTS OF FICTION WRITING: REVISION* (Writer's Digest Books, ISBN 0-89879-350-5, 170 pages, \$13.95), shows beginning writers how to transform their own experiences into salable stories, how to plot, rewrite, use POV, outline, etc. Using personal anecdotes and copious examples from the work of well-known writers (like Faulkner, Shirley Jackson, and dozens of others), Reed is a superb teacher. The last two chapters—"Office Procedures, or: Systems, Routines, the Security Corner and all the Things You Do to Keep from Going Crazy" and "Discipline"—are right on the money. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**BWANA & BULLY!** by Mike Resnick (TOR, Jun 91, 179 pages, \$3.99 US, \$4.99 Canada) It's nice to see a publisher give more than a tip of the hat to a segment of the genre that has had much to do with the growth of the field. I'm referring to the TOR doubles program, which publishes a pair of novellas, typically by different authors but this time a pair by the same.

Every once in a while an author will tap into an insightful new vein and produce a work that will leave others scratching their heads and

wondering why they didn't get there first. Resnick has done this through his usage of African myths, building an entire world where once only a village stood.

Resnick has been to Africa a number of times, and he knows the country and its people. This enables him to infuse his characters with traits and mannerisms that ring true and are at the same time human and alien.

This double contains two of Resnick's Africa stories. The first is part of his Kirinyaga saga—the continuing (so far) story of the descendants of the Kikuyu who have moved to another planet in order to retain the ways of their ancestors. Bwana picks up the story in mid-stream and deals with the arrival of a hunter, hired by the Kikuyu against the wishes of the mundumugu—the witchdoctor and keeper of the faith—to reduce the predator population. Since Kirinyaga is a very unstable environment, socially speaking, to begin with, any introduction of outsiders is bound to create stress and conflict. BULLY, Resnick's second story is set in Africa and deals with the possibility of what would have happened if Theodore Roosevelt decided to carve out an independent country in Central Africa (as he is supposed to have been known to think about). While the story is mainstream in terms of fantastic elements and only qualifies as science fiction due to its alternate-world nature, the telling is no less expert and enthralling.

In fact, Resnick is best when warping the real world with a twist and a turn, fleshing out his characters with real ambitions, concerns

and emotions, and letting them tell the story in their own terms.

This book is an excellent introduction to Resnick's worlds and for those who missed these stories in the magazines it offers an opportunity to discover the short story writer behind the novelist. Both BWANA & BULLY are fine examples of what the field has to offer as well as fine examples of a writer hitting his full stride.

—reviewed by Steven Sawicki

NIGHT by Alan Rodgers (Bantam/Spectra, Nov 91, ISBN 0-553-28971-3, 439 pages, \$4.99; pb) When Tim Fischer's grandfather (actually his great-great grandfather) is murdered in what is made to look like a car accident, Tim isn't ready yet to inherit the custodianship of the last existing piece of the True Cross, a shard of wood infused with Christ's living blood (the blood of Christ is a powerful symbol in this fast-paced quest novel). Does Tim possess the necessary qualifications to become the next steward of the cross? Is Old Abraham Fischer—Tim's ancestor and the first steward of the cross—the carpenter who nailed Christ's hands and feet to the cross? Is Old Abraham still alive in the form of "The Bleeding Man"? After murdering Tim's grandfather and stealing the cross, will The Bleeding Man succeed in corrupting Tim's soul? Though the end of the novel leaves several important questions left unanswered, the story works exceedingly well on several different levels. A superb novel you

won't be able to put down.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

THE BRIDGE by John Skipp and Craig Spector (Bantam, Oct 91, ISBN 0-553-29027-4, 420 pages, \$4.99; pb) This could have been—should have been—a much better book. Knowing what Skipp and Spector are capable of doing (read THE SCREAM, for example, to see them at top form), one expects their new novel to be a tour de force expose. Instead, they've written what reads like an episode of the SWAMP THING comic book that isn't half as good as Alan Moore might do.

Maybe if there weren't so many only-half-developed throwaway characters—if the authors had focused on one viewpoint character we could care about—the book might have been better. Maybe if the authors had taken more time to make Gary or Gwen or Micki or Laura or Jenny or Dietz or Garth or Lydia seem like whole human beings instead of crudely-constructed caricatures—or if the dialogue had really mattered or the narrative had been less italicized or the premise less improbable—the novel might have worked as a story. But it didn't work. At least, it didn't work for me.

Part of the problem is the angry hellfire-and-brimstone tone that suffuses every page like a Sunday morning sermon by a bible-thumping money-grubbing televangelist. The sins of our fathers, preach the authors, have damned all of humankind to hell. There's no future for any of us. Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind: We—through greed or neglect

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or ignorance—have damned ourselves and now it's time to reap what we've sown.

Instead of scaring the hell out of us, however, Skipp and Spector make us laugh at the slapstick stereotypes that populate Paradise, PA (and, presumably, the rest of the America).

There's just too much here to take it all seriously, folks. You'll go mad if you try. Toxic waste, acid rain, and nuclear melt-down rate individual novel-length explorations. The authors tried to cram too much into too fragile a plot-line, and the book—which should have been and could have been a GREAT novel—simply fell apart at the seams.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**COLD SHOCKS** edited by Tim Sullivan (Avon, Jan 91, ISBN 0-380-76160-2, 309 pages, \$4.50; pb) An excellent anthology with several standout stories: "The Pavillion of Frozen Women" by S. P. Somtow, "First Kill" by Chet Williamson, and the very remarkable "Bring Me the Head of Timothy Leary" by Nancy Holder. Holder's unobtrusive command of the English language is something every creative writing student in the country should be compelled to study. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Paul Dale Anderson

**SEXPUNKS & SAVAGE SAGAS** by Richard Sulphen (Spine-Tingling Press, Oct 91, ISBN 0-87544-476-2, 254 pages, \$18.95; hc) Crass, vulgar, crude. Steamy, seamy, rude. If you're fixated with the idea of spirit possession or the fear of AIDS or fear of castration, these vignettes (I hesitate to call any of the pieces in this single-author collection stories) will knock your socks off!

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**RAISING THE STONES** by Sheri S. Tepper (Bantam Spectra, Sep 91, ISBN 0-553-29116-5, 530 pages, \$5.99; pb) How will future societies, isolated communities of humans on "settlement planets"—separated from each other by millions of miles of space—evolve? How will alien environments adversely or beneficially affect human minds and bodies? Religious beliefs? Societal systems? Human mating rituals?

Tepper is a brilliant—although painstakingly slow-paced at the beginning of a novel—writer who explores such questions in considerable depth. Like GRASS, RAISING THE STONES takes a hard look at human beliefs and customs (including tribal religious beliefs). This time the point of view is primarily that of a handful of agricultural settlers on Hobbs Land who enjoy a functional patriarchy and benefit from a living god left over from the previous inhabitants of the planet, the Owlbird People.

A god who not only lives, but grows.

Grows like a fungus.

Descendants of the dispersed remnants of Manhome (old Earth) now occupy dozens of planets and moons in this sector, each occupying a specific market-niche that contributes goods and services which Central management of Hobbs Transystem teleports through "Doors". Maire Girat is an emigre to Hobbs Land from patriarchal Voorstod, and her son,

Sam, is Topman (Executive Manager) at Settlement One. Sam is a man with a mission, though he isn't quite sure what that mission is through most of the book. He dreams of the day when he'll be reunited with his father, Phaed Girat. When he finally is reunited with his father, all hell breaks loose.

RAISING THE STONES is a story of gods at war, the things great legends are made of. Tepper may have used a few too many characters and points of view (and a few too many slow-moving pages at the beginning) to consider RAISING THE STONES a perfect novel (though those who love Russian novels with a cast of thousands of hard-to-pronounce names may disagree with me). This novel is, however, an amazing read. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**VAMPIRE WINTER** by Lois Tilton (Pinnacle, Dec 90, ISBN 1-55817-450-8, 320 pages, \$4.50 US; pb) Tilton's first published novel has a superb plot: Humans have destroyed civilization with their petty fighting, and nuclear winter has claimed what's left of the earth. Radioactive clouds block out the sun, turning day into perpetual night. It sounds like a vampire's dream come true, doesn't it?

But Blaine Kittredge can't stomach radiation-infected blood, and the few remaining untainted humans have banded together or locked themselves away in secure shelters. Kittredge has to work harder than ever to acquire a decent meal.

And what, he wonders, will he do when the last of the canned goods run out and those few remaining humans die of starvation or kill each other off fighting over a can of corn?

Kittredge—faced with the dilemma of finding ways to help beleaguered humans survive the harsh nuclear winter or losing his only viable blood source—has to battle roving bands of marauding raiders, the ignorance, superstitions, and fear of those he's trying to help, other vampires preying on the same diminishing herd of humans, and his own insatiable bloodlust. After 150 years of feeding frenzies, can Kittredge now control his unholy desires? Or will he and his kind kill off the last living humans and suffer an eternity of unsatisfied hunger?

I've got to rank VAMPIRE WINTER at the top of my list of favorite vampire tales (right up there with "SALEM'S LOT, SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK, and SHATTERED GLASS). This is a finely-crafted first novel that surpasses my expectations. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE BLACK LODGE** by Robert Weinberg (Pocket Books, Nov 91, ISBN 0-671-70108-8, 275 pages, \$4.50; pb) Mixing Kabbalistic magic, elements of the Black Mass, legends of the Knights Templar, and authentic principles of Haitian Vodou, Weinberg has created a fascinating action-adventure tale that reads like a fast-paced detective novel. Sidney Taine is a pulp-style PI with offices in the Acme Building on Chicago's Near North Side—not unlike a series character from Chandler or

Hammett, except Taine is a modern-day psychic detective who wields magic words the way Phil Marlowe or Sam Spade wield guns. This ain't meant to be great literature, folks; but it's definitely a great read. The Dark Man scenes are brilliantly rendered and powerfully scary.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**HOW TO WRITE TALES OF HORROR, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION** edited by J. N. Williamson (Writer's Digest Books, Sep 91, ISBN 0-89879-483-8, 242 pages, \$12.95; pb) Some of the best and brightest stars in the galaxy of genre fiction contribute articles to Williamson's now-legendary HOW-TO: Ray Bradbury, Bob Bock, Dean Koontz, Rick McCammon, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Bill Nolan, Alan Rodgers, Ramsey Campbell, R. C. Matheson, Mort Castle, Jim Kinsler, Charlie Grant, Steve Rasnic Tem, Jerry Williamson, Janet Fox, Katherine Ramsland (author of the wonderful new Anne Rice biography), Doug Winter, Pat LaBrutto (former editor at Doubleday and co-editor of RAZORED SADDLES), Colin Wilson, Jeannette Hopper, Darrell Schweitzer, Michael A. Banks, Sharon Baker, Ardath Mayhar, Thomas Miletand, and Mary T. Williamson (Jerry's wife and a well-known literary agent). Just about everybody who is anybody in genre fiction—including Stephen King and Harlan Ellison—contributed to "Jerry's Book of Lists" (or Jerry's "Lists of Books"), a compilation of "favorite" or "best remembered" or "recommended" titles of genre novels and short stories. Williamson's HOW-TO is a must read for anyone interested in writing fantasy fiction.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**MASQUES IV** edited by J. N. Williamson (Macday, Oct 91, ISBN 0-940776-26-X, 247 pages, \$19.95; hc) Few original anthology series consistently win awards, and fewer still can claim more than one outstanding story in each volume. Like Charlie Grant's SHADOWS and Tom Monteleone's BORDERLANDS, Jerry Williamson's MASQUES contain some of the best stories you'll ever read. MASQUES IV has seven great stories that deserve awards: "Love, Hate, and the Beautiful Junkyard Sea" by Mort Castle, a poignant fantasy tale that's as good or better than anything Ray Bradbury's ever written; "Savages" by Darrell Schweitzer, a look inside the secret heart of all of us; "The Other Woman" by Lois Tilton, a story about obsessive love; "Obscene Phone Calls" by John Coyne, something that isn't really a horror story but leaves one with the same chilling feeling of terrible loss; "The Pack" by Chet Williamson, an exploration of one's proper place in the food chain; "Splatter Me an Angel" by James Kinsler, an unusual look at divine revelation; and "Milestone's Face" by Gary Brandner, a story anyone over the age of 40 will remember each time he or she looks in the mirror. Other fine stories include "Children" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, "Sea Gulls" by Gahan Wilson, "The Coming of Night, The Passing of Day" by Ed Gorman, "Please Don't Hurt Me" by F. Paul Wilson, "Pratfall" by John Macday (a decep-

tively simple story that haunts readers long afterwards), "The Heart of Helen Day" by Graham Masterton, "Nothing But the Best" by Brian McNaughton, "Julia's Touch" by David T. Connolly (a well-written and effective mood piece), "The Collapse of Civilization" by Ray Russell, "Animal Husbandry" by Bruce Boston, "Sounds" by Kathryn Ptacek, "The Children Never Lie" by Cameron Nolan, "Sources of the Nile" by Rick Hautala, "Collaborationists" by J. N. Williamson, "My Private Memoirs of the Hoffer Stigmata Pandemic" by Dan Simmons, and "The Secret" by Steve Allen, the volume's only reprint. t. Winter-Dumas and Denise Dumas contribute poetry, Williamson contributes an introduction, and publisher Macley adds an afterword. One of the three best anthologies published in a year filled with excellent anthologies. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF THE SUPERNATURAL** by Colin Wilson (Carroll & Graf, Oct 91, ISBN 0-8184-734-8, 567 pages, \$9.95; pb) Wilson (and his son, Damon) ask readers to keep an open mind as they explore all aspects of the supernatural, from ritual magic and witchcraft, to vampires, werewolves, and UFOs. This valuable reference work is a welcome addition to any horror writer's bookshelf. Highly recommended.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

**STRANGER SUNS** by George Zebrowski (Bantam Spectra, Sep 91, ISBN 0-553-29175-0, 310 pages, \$4.50; pb) Imagine the existence of a universe-wide space-time web fueled by the power of a thousand suns—a network of interconnected realities that varies with the presence of a single perceiver. "A kind of Schrodinger's Door, leading into variants of our world line." What's real and what's illusion in such a universe? Will mankind ever know?

What happened to the builders of such a intricate power web—that mighty race of humanoid beings who roamed the stars at will? Did they kill each other off? Did they die of boredom once they'd found the ultimate answers and had nothing left to strive for? Or did they evolve into a higher form of consciousness—something no longer humanoid that has no need of our physical universe to sustain itself?

Juan, Lena, Malachi and Magnus are loners from an eco-ravished earth sent to explore the infinite possibilities available to anyone who steps through the various doors

(frames) located in abandoned starships or inside the cores of a thousand suns. The story gets a mite too esoterically speculative toward the end, but this is still a dynamite tale I can heartily recommend to readers who like well-written hard sf.

—reviewed by Irwin Chapman

## CHAPMAN'S PICKS

**Earth** by David Brin (Bantam/Spectra, Jun 91, \$5.99 pb)

**Great Work of Time** by John Crowley (Bantam/Spectra, Aug 91, \$3.99 pb)

**The Mutant Prime** by Karen Haber (Bantam/Spectra, Aug 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Allen Tongue** by Stephen Leigh (Bantam/Spectra, Aug 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Red Genesis** by S. C. Sykes (Bantam/Spectra, Aug 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Death Gate Cycle II: Elven Star** by Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman (Bantam/Spectra, Aug 91, \$4.99 pb)

**The Caves of Steel** by Isaac Asimov (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**I, Robot** by Isaac Asimov (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**The Naked Sun** by Isaac Asimov (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Servant of the Empire** by Raymond E. Feist & Janny Wurts (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$5.99 pb)

**Clove Hooves** by Megan Lindholm (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**The Songkiller Saga: Picking the Ballad's Bones** by Elizabeth Scarborough (Bantam/Spectra, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Ghost From the Grand Banks** by Arthur C. Clarke (Bantam/Spectra, Jan 92, \$5.99 pb)

**Otherworld** by Kenneth C. Flint (Bantam/Spectra, Jan 92, \$4.99 pb)

**Through the Heart** by Richard Grant (Bantam/Spectra, Jan 92, \$4.99 pb)

**The Missing Matter** by Thomas R. McDonough (Bantam/Spectra, Jan 92, \$4.99 pb)

**Nothing Sacred** by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough (Bantam/Spectra, Jan 92, \$4.99 pb)

**Murder Along The Way** by Kenneth Gribetz, D.A., & H. Paul Jeffers (Berkley, Jul 91, \$4.95 pb)

**The Empire of Fear** by Brian Stableford (Carroll & Graf, Sep 91, \$20.95 hc)

**Requiem for the Conqueror** by W. Michael Gear (DAW, Jul 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Sword-Breaker** by Jennifer Roberson (DAW, Jul 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Outlander** by Diane Gabaldon (Delacorte, Jul 91, \$20.00 hc)

**Beauty** by Sheri S. Tepper (Doubleday, Aug 91, \$20.00 hc, \$12.00 pb)

**A Bridge of Years** by Robert Charles Wilson (Doubleday, Sep 91, \$12.00 pb)

**Tales From the One-Eyed Crow: The Vulgarmaster** by Dennis L. McKiernan (NAL/ROC, Jul 91, \$3.50 pb)

**Duel of the Dragons** by Gael Baudino (NAL/ROC, Aug 91, \$4.99 pb)

**Surfing Samurai Robots** by Mel Gilden (NAL/ROC, Aug 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Way of the Clans** by Robert Thurston (NAL/ROC, Aug 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Red Iron Nights** by Glen Cook (NAL/ROC, Sep 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Harmony** by Marjorie Bradley Kellogg (NAL/ROC, Sep 91, \$5.50 pb)

**What's Wrong with Valerie?** by D. A. Fowler (Pocket, Aug 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Vampires Among Us** by Rosemary Ellen Guiley (Pocket, Aug 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Demon Dance** by T. Chris Martindale (Pocket, Sep 91, \$4.95 pb)

**Skin of the Soul** by Lisa Tuttle (Pocket, Oct 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Deathchain** by Ken Greenhall (Pocket, Dec 91, \$4.50 pb)

**Christmas Babies** by Christopher Keane & William D. Black M.D. (Pocket, Dec 91, \$4.99 pb)

**More Shapes Than One** by Fred Chappell (St. Martin's, Sep 91)

**The Best of Pulpouse** edited by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (St. Martin's, Sep 91, \$22.95 hc)

**Norby and The Court Jester** (ya) by Janet & Isaac Asimov (Walker, 1991, \$14.95 hc)

**The Cruel Mother** by Janet LaPierre (Worldwide, Aug 91, \$3.95 pb)

**Hooky Gets the Wooden Spoon** by Laurence Meynell (Worldwide, Aug 91, \$3.95 pb)

**Frigor Mortis** by Ralph McInerney (Worldwide, Sep 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Murder has a Pretty Face** by Jennie Melville (Worldwide, Sep 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Backlash** by Paula Gosling (Worldwide, Oct 91, \$3.99 pb)

**With Intent To Kill** by Hugh Pentecost (Worldwide, Oct 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Murder at Muskot Beach** by Bernie Lee (Worldwide, Nov 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Hal's Own Murder Case** by Lee Martin (Worldwide, Nov 91, \$3.99 pb)

**A Sensitive Case** by Eric Wright (Worldwide, Nov 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Deadly Promise** by Mignon F. Ballard (Worldwide, Dec 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Night Walker** by Joan Hager (Worldwide, Dec 91, \$3.99 pb)

**Flight to Yesterday** by Velda Johnson (Worldwide, Jan 92, \$3.99 pb)

**The Fiction Writer's Silent Partner** by Martin Roth (Writer's Digest, Fall 91, \$19.95 hc)

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